

Birkwood Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106620
Local Authority	Barnsley
Inspection number	309178
Inspection dates	8–9 July 2008
Reporting inspector	John Rutherford HMI

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	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	250
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Glynnis White
Headteacher	Mrs Joyce Shaw
Date of previous school inspection	31 January 2005
School address	Darfield Road Cudworth Barnsley South Yorkshire S72 8HG
Telephone number	01226 710447
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Introduction

The school was inspected by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector seconded to Ofsted

Description of the school

The school is of average size and it serves an area of social and economic disadvantage. The proportion of pupils eligible for a free school meal is above average. There are very few pupils from a minority ethnic background or whose first language is not English. The proportion of pupils with a learning difficulty and/or disability is above average. The school has received the Silver Healthy Schools Award and the Silver Artsmark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory quality of education, with good features in the Foundation Stage, the curriculum, the care, guidance and support for pupils and pupils' personal development. The school evaluated itself as good overall, having made a number of improvements to teaching and learning, assessment and leadership. The inspection evidence cannot support this judgement because the improvements have resulted in good teaching and good pupil progress in a small number of classes only. In the majority of classes, pupils' progress is rarely better than average because new approaches have not yet been thoroughly consolidated and the quality of teaching and learning is largely satisfactory.

Pupils start in Key Stage 1 with skills below those typical for their age and they make satisfactory progress overall, although it accelerates markedly in a small number of classes. When pupils leave at the end of Key Stage 2, their standards are broadly average to below average, although this is largely because of a rapid increase in their progress in Year 6. In other classes, including the end of Key Stage 1, standards are below average. As a result of very recent improvements in the Foundation Stage, children are making good progress in their first two years of education and, from September 2008, will be starting Key Stage 1 with better developed skills than has been the case in the past.

The peaks and troughs in pupils' progress link directly to differences between classes in the quality of teaching and learning. Pupils make good progress in those lessons where teachers challenge and enthuse them. In the majority of lessons, however, teachers do not use assessment information effectively enough to help most pupils to lift their progress above the average rate.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. They enjoy coming to school, although attendance figures are below average. They behave well, have good attitudes to learning and are keen to take on additional responsibilities. A rich curriculum, with a strong emphasis on performing arts and sports, increases pupils' enjoyment of school and gives them a good range of opportunities to develop their talents. The care for pupils is good. Support for pupils who are underachieving or who have a learning difficulty and/or disability is well planned and enables them to make satisfactory, and in some cases, good progress.

Leadership and management at all levels are satisfactory in raising pupils' achievement. The headteacher and deputy headteacher form a good partnership as a senior leadership team. They recognise the need to improve teaching and learning so that pupils can make the same good progress in all classes. As a step towards this, they have already started to develop the role of middle leaders to support colleagues in improving their practice. There has been some early success, but there is still much work to do. Governors provide the school with good support. They are not, however, gaining sufficient understanding of pupils' progress to enable them to hold the school to account. Overall the school provides satisfactory value for money and it enjoys the full support of the majority of parents.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The quality of education and care has improved in the last year and it is now good. Children make good progress, especially in speaking and listening, independent learning and personal and social development. The Foundation Stage combines the Nursery and Reception classes

and it is well led. Staff work well together to ensure that the needs of all children are met. Teachers plan an exciting range of activities which are linked by a theme that captures the children's interest.

Adult-led activities and role-play enable the children to make good progress in developing their communication skills. When children are not working with an adult, well-organised resources encourage them to make their own choice of learning activity. They play purposefully and cooperate well with their friends. The outdoor area is used effectively for children to consolidate their new skills in different contexts. Outdoor play also gives them good opportunities to develop their skills in climbing, balancing and controlling wheeled toys.

There is well-planned provision for children to develop their early writing skills and to learn letters and sounds in words. The staff have a good system for gathering a wide range of evidence about children's achievements and they use this effectively to match future activities to the children's needs. The Foundation Stage leader has a clear understanding of the priorities for future development, which include developing children's knowledge and understanding of the world.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve achievement and standards in English, mathematics and science throughout Key Stages 1 and 2.
- Improve attendance.
- Improve the consistency of good teaching and learning throughout Key Stages 1 and 2.
- Enable leaders at all levels to make a more effective contribution to school improvement.

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

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall. They start school with skills below those typical for their age and, by the time they leave, their standards are broadly average in mathematics and science, and below average in English. Pupils' good achievement in mathematics and science results from very rapid progress in Year 6. In other classes standards are below average.

Pupils make good progress in the final years of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, where teaching is stronger. In the majority of classes, pupils make satisfactory progress overall, although there are some classes where progress in mathematics is too slow. This is because teachers have recently put considerable effort into raising achievement in English, which is beginning to make a positive difference, but it has taken their attention away from making sure that pupils are making enough progress in mathematics.

Pupils with a learning difficulty and/or disability make satisfactory progress overall, although there are a number of cases where progress is good because of well-planned support for them. Pupils identified as falling behind mostly make good progress and are helped to catch up. This is because their needs are identified at an early stage and good programmes of support are provided. The more able pupils make good progress throughout the school because of the additional challenge provided in lessons and extra-curricular activities.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. Pupils understand their responsibilities and enthusiastically participate in leadership duties such as playground leaders and classroom monitors. They learn about their own heritage and other cultures through drama, art, activities in the local community and visitors to school.

Pupils enjoy lessons and taking part in the wide range of extra-curricular activities. Even so, attendance is below average despite the school's efforts to improve it. Pupils' behaviour is good and they have a responsible attitude to learning. They talk enthusiastically about their healthy lifestyles and how the school has received the Silver Healthy Schools Award. Some pupils sit on the task group with staff and governors and help to plan methods for further promoting healthy living, such as inviting pupils and staff to the 'Top Table' at lunch-time when they make healthy food choices. Pupils feel safe and know who to talk to should they have any concerns. On the rare occasions when bullying occurs, they are confident that it is dealt with quickly.

The school council engages many pupils in making a positive contribution to the life of the school and the wider community. They are currently helping the local church to raise awareness of poverty in parts of Africa and they are encouraging pupils to help by raising funds to buy a cow for an African village. Pupils are developing many personal skills that form a good foundation for their future education and employment, however, their progress in developing literacy and numeracy skills means that their preparation for their future economic well-being is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. There is some variability, with good teaching in a minority of classes. In the most effective lessons, pupils are thoroughly engaged in a good range of interesting activities. These are carefully planned to provide the right level of challenge for each group within the class. Teachers continuously assess pupils' progress and give feedback that helps them improve their work. There is a brisk pace to lessons and the teachers' enthusiasm motivates the pupils to make good progress. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used effectively to support pupils' learning. Pupils work very well independently.

Where teaching is satisfactory, lessons are carefully planned to meet the needs of all the pupils and teachers provide interesting, enjoyable activities. Teachers have good relationships with the pupils and encourage them when they are struggling. They do much to help pupils to develop their speaking and listening skills. However, lessons do not always have a sharp enough focus and activities do not always engage all of the pupils. Teachers' assessment of pupils' progress during lessons is often superficial and not used effectively to increase the level of challenge or support where required. Marking does not always provide sufficient information about how pupils can improve their work. In the majority of lessons, teaching assistants make a good contribution to the progress of the pupils they work with.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It provides a broad and rich range of experiences and is planned to ensure that pupils can increase their skills and knowledge with each new unit of work. There is good provision for pupils to develop their writing and ICT skills in a range of different subjects. On the whole, however, there are not enough links between most subjects, therefore pupils' learning is rather disjointed. The school has recognised this and has already started to plan new approaches to organising the curriculum.

The strong emphasis on performing arts is a major strength in the curriculum and extra-curricular programme. The regular opportunities for many pupils to take part in high quality performances make a strong contribution to their speaking skills, their understanding of literature and their confidence. The school has recently won two regional awards for the quality of its drama productions. Many pupils also enjoy participating in a wide range of sporting and dance activities, often enhanced by expert coaches and the use of community facilities. Pupils understand the link between these activities and leading a healthy lifestyle.

The school makes good use of the local environment to support pupils' learning in a number of subjects. The curriculum makes a strong contribution to pupils' personal development, for example, learning about relationships and other cultures. There are effective processes in place for planning and refining programmes of additional support for pupils who are underachieving or who have a learning difficulty and/or disability.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The pastoral care for the pupils is a strength of the school. Staff work hard to ensure the well-being of pupils and to encourage them to enjoy all that the school has to offer. They provide good guidance on how to behave and make relationships within a community. The promotion of health and safety in and around the school takes a high priority. Risk assessment and child protection procedures are securely in place. The school works in effective partnership with external agencies to provide support for vulnerable pupils when necessary. The school is well supported by the majority of parents, although a small number allow their children to be absent during term time to take a holiday. This contributes to the school's attendance figures being below average.

Teachers make good use of a recently introduced tracking system to monitor pupils' progress. They use this effectively to provide support at an early stage for pupils at risk of falling behind in their work. This support is often provided by well trained and committed teaching assistants and it is of good quality. Teachers also use assessment information to give pupils targets to help them improve their achievement in English and mathematics. This work is at an early stage of development and only a small number of older pupils can talk with confidence about what they need to do to achieve their targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The headteacher and deputy headteacher form a good partnership as a senior leadership team and they have led the school through a

period of improvement. They have developed strengths in the curriculum and care, guidance and support which have a good impact on pupils' personal development. They have introduced improvements in teaching and learning and the use of assessment to raise pupils' achievement. These have not yet been consolidated in all classes, therefore there is unevenness in pupils' progress through the school and pupils' achievement, overall, is not as good as it might be.

The senior leadership team have made a good start in developing the role of middle leaders to improve teaching and learning across the school. There are already some good results from this, for example, the work of the new inclusion coordinator in making provision for pupils who are underachieving or who have a learning difficulty and/or disability. However, the majority of middle leaders are not yet having a sufficiently wide influence beyond their own classroom.

The school has identified important priorities for raising achievement, particularly in English, and work on these is beginning to make a positive difference. However, the school development plan gives insufficient priority to improving the quality of teaching and learning across the school. Targets to improve achievement are not ambitious enough because they will broadly keep standards where they are now. Senior leaders discuss the quality of teaching and pupils' progress with staff and provide constructive feedback. There is sometimes insufficient rigour in this process to bring about improvements where they are most needed.

Governors support the school effectively. They monitor the development plan to ensure that the senior leadership team has the resources to meet their priorities. They have a sound understanding of the variability in teaching and learning across the school, but they have not yet got a detailed picture of the impact of this on pupils' progress. They are, therefore, broadly satisfied with what the school is achieving now rather than seeking further improvement in standards. Given the leadership and management arrangements in place at the moment, and their impact on raising pupils' achievement, the school is demonstrating a satisfactory capacity to make further improvements.

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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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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 disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is 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
How well 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 the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 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.

Annex A

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 tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
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 very much for your help and courtesy when Mr Cox and I came to inspect your school. Many of you talked to us and gave us some very useful information which helped me to write my report. I would like to tell you what our judgements about your school are.

Your school gives you a satisfactory education. Teachers help you to make satisfactory progress in your English, mathematics and science. They provide good care for you and make sure that when you need extra help you get it quickly. You enjoy coming to school, although some of you do not attend as often as you might. Many of you particularly enjoy the exciting activities that your school provides especially the drama and sports. You also learn a great deal about how to be healthy and to make good relationships with others. We could see you putting this learning into practice while we were in the school.

We considered your behaviour to be good while we were in school and you always tried your hardest in lessons. You are keen to take on extra responsibilities and you carry them out very well. You also think hard about how you can help those who are less fortunate than yourselves, for example, by raising funds for a cow for an African village. My trip to the beach in the Foundation Stage was very worthwhile because I saw the children learning so much from all the exciting activities that were arranged for them.

Your staff and governors are keen to make the school even better. I have agreed with them some improvements that everybody in the school can help to bring about.

These are to:

- improve your progress in English, mathematics and science in all classes
- improve your attendance at school
- ensure that more of your lessons are as good as the best ones that we saw
- make it possible for teachers to work together more to improve your lessons.

Your teachers are giving you targets for improving your achievement and we are sure that you will all work as hard as possible to achieve them.