



# **INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE**

**BIRCHFIELD SCHOOL**

**INTEGRATED INSPECTION**

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## Birchfield School

Full Name of School	<b>Birchfield School</b>
DfE Number	<b>893/6014</b>
Registered Charity Number	<b>528420</b>
Address	<b>Birchfield School Harriott's Hayes Lane Albrighton Wolverhampton West Midlands WV7 3AF</b>
Telephone Number	<b>01902 372534</b>
Fax Number	<b>01902 373516</b>
Email Address	<b>office@birchfieldschool.co.uk</b>
Headmaster	<b>Mr Hugh Myott</b>
Chairman of Governors	<b>Mr Philip Cotter</b>
Age Range	<b>4 to 13</b>
Total Number of Pupils	<b>144</b>
Gender of Pupils	<b>Mixed (103 boys; 41 girls)</b>
Numbers by Age	4-5 (EYFS): <b>20</b> 5-13: <b>124</b>
Number of Day Pupils	Total: <b>132</b>
Number of Boarders	Total: <b>12</b> Full: <b>0</b> Weekly: <b>12</b>
Head of EYFS Setting	<b>Mrs Carolyn Gould</b>
EYFS Gender	<b>Mixed</b>
Inspection dates	<b>28 Feb 2012 to 02 Mar 2012</b>

## PREFACE

This inspection report follows the *ISI schedule*, which occupies a period of four continuous days in the school. The previous ISI inspection was in October 2007.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010. The range of these Regulations, which replace those first introduced on 1 September 2003, can be viewed through the following link: [www.legislation.gov.uk](http://www.legislation.gov.uk). Search for Independent School Standards Regulations and enter date 2010, to find Schedule 1, Parts 1-7.

Legislation additional to Part 3, Welfare, health and safety of pupils, is as follows.

- (i) The Equality Act 2010 (including race, gender, special educational needs and disability).
- (ii) The School Standards and Framework Act 1998, banning corporal punishment.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

ISI is also approved to inspect the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which was introduced in September 2008 and applies to all children in England from birth to 31<sup>st</sup> August following their fifth birthday. This report evaluates the extent to which the setting fulfils the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and follows the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 as subsequently amended.

Under Government arrangements, the inspection of boarding became an integrated part of ISI inspections from 1 September 2011. This inspection contains specific judgements on the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the recommendations set out in the most recent statutory boarding inspection and evaluates the quality of the boarding experience and its contribution to pupils' education, personal development and welfare. Boarding inspections were previously carried out by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), Children's Services and Skills. The relevant Ofsted report refers to an inspection in June 2010 and can be found at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk) under Children's social care/Boarding school.

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, although inspectors comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on children. The inspection does not include:

- (i) an exhaustive health and safety audit
- (ii) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features
- (iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures
- (iv) an in-depth investigation of the school's compliance with employment law.

Both Ofsted and ISI inspect and report on the Independent School Standards Regulations. However, they apply different frameworks and have different criteria for judging school quality that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. Both use a four point scale when making judgements of quality but, whilst the ISI terminology reflects quality

judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by Ofsted, they also reflect the differences in approach. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement on each aspect of the school's work at the beginning of each section. **These headline statements must include one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory', and where Achievement is 'exceptional' that term may be used for the top grade.** Elsewhere in the report, inspectors may use a range of different adjectives to make judgements. **For EYFS registered provision (for pupils aged under three), reports are required to use the same terminology ('outstanding', 'good', 'satisfactory' and 'inadequate') as Ofsted reports.**

## **INSPECTION EVIDENCE**

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the chairman of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

### **Inspectors**

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Reporting Inspector

Team Inspector (Former Head, IAPS school)

Co-ordinating Inspector for Boarding

Co-ordinating Inspector for Early Years

## CONTENTS

	Page
<b>1 THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>(a) Main findings</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>(b) Action points</b>	<b>4</b>
(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements	4
(ii) Recommendations for further improvement	4
<b>3 THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS</b>	<b>5</b>
(a) The quality of the pupils' achievements and learning	5
(b) The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision (including community links of benefit to pupils)	6
(c) The contribution of teaching	7
<b>4 THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>9</b>
(a) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils	9
(b) The contribution of arrangements for pastoral care	10
(c) The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety	11
(d) The quality of boarding	11
<b>5 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT</b>	<b>14</b>
(a) The quality of governance	14
(b) The quality of leadership and management, including links with parents, carers and guardians	14

## 1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Birchfield School was founded in 1935 at Tettenhall, near Wolverhampton, as a preparatory school for boys. In 1962 it moved to its present site near Albrighton on the border of Shropshire and Staffordshire and became an educational trust with a board of governors, which continues to take responsibility for overall management. The school is based in an Edwardian country house and purpose-built modern buildings, set in 20 acres of woods, gardens and playing fields.
- 1.2 Girls have been admitted to the Reception class since 2006, so now only the three oldest year groups consist entirely of boys. In the co-educational part of the school, two-fifths of the pupils are girls. Altogether, 144 pupils aged 4 to 13 attend the school, including 20 aged 4 to 5 in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Younger children may attend nursery provision on the school premises, offered by a separate organisation, independent of the school. Weekly boarding is available, and at the time of the inspection 12 boys in Years 7 and 8 were boarders, accommodated in a self-contained boarding house on the first floor of the main school building.
- 1.3 The school's aims are: to provide the highest standards of academic teaching and pastoral care; to provide a stimulating and supportive environment, encompassing the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; to promote excellence through opportunities to accept responsibility and to contribute to the community and society; and to encourage a lifelong love of learning. It seeks to place paramount importance on manners, and to instil in pupils respect for each other and values of working and living together productively, while developing self-esteem, independence and self-confidence in a safe but challenging environment.
- 1.4 Since the previous inspection in 2007, a new headmaster has been appointed, and cultural and physical changes have taken place as the school evolves to become fully co-educational, including the appointment of a senior mistress and staff for girls' games. In addition, the role of the governors has changed.
- 1.5 Entry to the school is not selective on the basis of academic ability. The ability profile of the school is above the national average overall, with a fairly wide spread of abilities and some variation in average ability between year groups. The majority of pupils are of white British origin, with a small number from Asian and other backgrounds. Most pupils come from professional or business families, and live within easy commuting distance of the school. Two pupils speak English as an additional language (EAL), and support is provided as necessary. The school has identified 32 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), and 24 receive specialist learning support. No pupil has a statement of special educational needs.

- 1.6 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. The year group nomenclature used by the school and its National Curriculum (NC) equivalence are shown in the following tables.

***Early Years Foundation Stage Setting***

School	NC name
IC	Reception

***Pre-Prep***

School	NC name
IB	Year 1
IA	Year 2

***Upper School***

School	NC name
IIB	Year 3
II	Year 4
IIA	Year 5
Shell B	Year 6
Shell	Year 7
Form III	Year 8

## **2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL**

### **2.(a) Main findings**

- 2.1 The overall achievement of the pupils is excellent, because of their highly positive attitude to learning; they approach every task with great enthusiasm. They go on from Birchfield to a range of selective independent senior schools, often achieving scholarships. Much excellent teaching is the foundation for this success, although in a few of the lessons observed the specific needs of a small number of pupils were occasionally overlooked. Marking is very thorough and includes much praise and advice for improvement. Pupils are successful beyond the classroom, with significant achievements in sport, music, art and drama. Extra-curricular activities contribute very well to school life. Enhancements to the excellent curriculum by trips and visitors also add to the school's success. The quality of the provision in the EYFS is excellent. This is largely because all the adults have a comprehensive knowledge of how young children learn, and put their experience to good effect when planning for the learning, development and care of all in the class, and in carrying out these plans.
- 2.2 The pupils' personal development is excellent. Pupils often show maturity beyond their years in the way that they care for each other and look after any visitors. Relationships within the school are extremely positive, and all adults are excellent role models, providing a high standard of pastoral care for the pupils. Pupils are able to take on responsibilities within the school, although currently opportunities for this are limited. Arrangements for health and safety are good. Safeguarding the welfare of the pupils is of utmost concern to all staff. Requisite procedures and policies are now in place, and staff are trained appropriately. The availability of high quality boarding is an effective preparation for those who may be considering boarding at senior school.
- 2.3 The governors provide good oversight of the school; they now discharge their statutory duties diligently, and they have an exciting vision for the school's future development. In the past this was not always the case in relation to their responsibilities for the review of policies and procedures, although pupils were never put at risk. Excellent leadership and management at all levels enable day-to-day school life to proceed calmly and efficiently. In their pre-inspection questionnaire, parents were highly supportive of all that the school does for their children, particularly appreciating the ease with which they may liaise with staff, the range of extra-curricular activities and the progress made by their children. Recommendations of the previous inspection have all been met.

## **2.(b) Action points**

### **(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements**

(The range of the Independent School Standards Regulations is available through the link described in the Preface)

- 2.4 The school meets all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010.
- 2.5 The school meets all the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2011.

### **(ii) Recommendations for further improvement**

- 2.6 The school is advised to make the following improvements.
  - 1. Ensure that the quality of teaching in the many lessons in which the unique needs of every pupil are always acknowledged is extended to all lessons.
  - 2. Provide further opportunities for pupils of all ages to take on responsibilities to contribute to the day-to-day organisation and society of the school.

### **3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS**

#### **3.(a) The quality of the pupils' achievements and learning**

- 3.1 The quality of the pupils' achievements and learning is excellent.
- 3.2 The school is successful in meeting its objective of inspiring and developing all pupils to the highest degree within their capabilities. The pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills are very well developed in curricular and extra-curricular activities. From the youngest age, pupils speak eloquently and with confidence, and they all listen very carefully to adults and to each other. Children in the EYFS have a well-developed knowledge of phonics and number recognition. At all ages, they are active learners, able to work independently, think critically and be creative. Throughout the school, pupils read and write fluently. Logical and independent thought are often evident, for example in an art lesson when pupils made comparisons of the processes of pottery with those of making bread. High levels of creativity are evident, demonstrated in displays of artefacts in all parts of the school, and in musical and dramatic performances. Mathematical skills are well developed, and applied in other lessons, for example when making calculations in science lessons. Pupils compete with other schools in a range of sports, often with great success. All pupils, including those with SEND or EAL, go on to their first choice of independent senior school, many achieving academic, sporting, musical, artistic and all-round awards. Individual pupils are successful in examinations in music and in speech and drama. Extra-curricular activities enable further achievements, for example the accomplishments of the members of the fencing club.
- 3.3 Pupils' attainment cannot be measured in relation to average performance in national tests but, on the evidence available, it is judged to be excellent in relation to national age-related expectations. The pupils follow a demanding curriculum and admission to the senior independent schools to which they proceed often requires a high level of academic achievement. Inspection evidence from observations of lessons, scrutiny of work and discussions with individual pupils confirms this judgement, and includes consideration of the levels at which pupils are working in relation to national targets. This level of attainment as judged indicates that pupils make good progress in relation to pupils of similar ability. In the EYFS, all children show evidence of good progress towards achieving the Early Learning Goals. They also show excellent progress when measured against their own baseline assessments. Pupils with SEND or EAL, and those identified as gifted and talented, all make optimum progress and are therefore able to realise their full potential, reflecting the carefully planned support that they receive.
- 3.4 Pupils have highly positive attitudes to their work, and are notably eager and resourceful. As individuals, they often show the initiative to organise their work well, and take pride in the presentation of written work. Pupils often work in pairs or small groups, and they openly discuss information in a mature way, listening to the ideas of others, and then adapting their original viewpoint accordingly. Pupils are not afraid to experiment, take measured risks and persevere, even when encountering difficulties. In the EYFS, children clearly enjoy their learning and achieve well in what they know, understand and can do.

### **3.(b) The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision**

- 3.5 The quality of the curricular and extra-curricular provision is excellent.
- 3.6 The curriculum provides ample opportunity for pupils of all abilities and needs. It consistently offers many opportunities in line with the school's aim to develop the whole pupil by providing a rich, balanced and varied curriculum and extra-curricular programme, so that each can experience success and achievement at an appropriate level, regardless of ability. The curriculum is broadened by the inclusion of French from Year 2, current affairs for older pupils, and Latin for those in Years 7 and 8. Art, music and drama feature strongly in the curriculum. The pupils are provided with a good range of experiences in linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human, social and creative areas. In the EYFS, the curriculum is stimulating and well balanced, and covers all the areas of learning. Educational experiences are enjoyable and the children show genuine pleasure in the topics and activities they are offered. Numeracy and literacy in the EYFS are taught explicitly, and also through creative and practical activities. Individual needs are well met. The breadth of the curriculum throughout the school contributes towards the pupils' development of knowledge, skills and understanding, and thereby enables them to make progress.
- 3.7 Curricular support for pupils with SEND or EAL is excellent. Clear targets are set in individual education plans (IEPs), which allow these pupils' needs to be met effectively in individual and group lessons and with appropriate support in mainstream lessons. Provision is also made for the most able pupils. Those who have been identified as potential academic scholars at senior school are taught in a separate group in Years 7 and 8 for most subjects, joining their peers for some non-academic lessons.
- 3.8 Planning is excellent, and individual departments have well-organised schemes of work and comprehensive handbooks. Lesson plans are detailed, and show separate tasks for pupils of differing abilities, and opportunities for assessment. The adults in the EYFS all have a secure knowledge of how young children learn, and use their experience and knowledge well to plan for the learning and development of all the children in the class.
- 3.9 An effective strategy for personal, social and health education (PSHE) is implemented throughout the school. Subject leaders and senior managers meet termly to discuss planning and curriculum coverage, and these meetings contribute to development planning in all subject areas. Relevant senior staff have frequent meetings to ensure that transition between year groups and phases of education is smooth.
- 3.10 An excellent range of extra-curricular activities enhances the curriculum and enables all pupils, including those in the EYFS, to develop and extend their interests, abilities and knowledge in many sporting and creative ways. Clubs take place during morning and lunch breaks and after school. The pupils benefit from activities such as art, dance, sport, including golf and fencing, fashion, speech and drama, reading, concert band, choir and touch typing. A good range of day and residential visits and trips extends further the pupils' knowledge of the world around them. The pupils also benefit from visiting authors, musicians and theatrical groups.
- 3.11 Despite its rural location, the school maintains close links with the local community, inviting other schools and groups to use the various facilities, and the pupils perform

and learn within the local surrounding area. The school has developed links with local charities as well as those further afield.

### **3.(c) The contribution of teaching**

- 3.12 The overall quality of teaching is excellent.
- 3.13 Teaching supports fully the school's aim to provide the highest standards of academic teaching for the pupils in its care. It is imaginative, and consequently the pupils are keen to achieve their best. Nearly all teaching observed was at least good, with no unsatisfactory examples seen. The most successful lessons were characterised by brisk pace and careful management of time. Teachers' expectations were high and catered for all abilities. In a small number of other lessons, teachers did not always take account of every pupil's specific needs throughout the lesson, and consequently in these lessons some pupils' progress was limited.
- 3.14 Generally, lessons build extremely well on pupils' previous knowledge and individual needs. Teachers have a very secure knowledge of their subjects, and their enthusiasm enables the pupils successfully to develop their learning skills and a sense of achievement.
- 3.15 Teaching employs a varied, stimulating range of approaches to promote learning. For example, younger pupils were encouraged to produce excellent work on punctuation by the teacher 'casting a spell' over a cauldron on Book Day. Teachers know their pupils very well and employ effective questioning techniques. Individual praise, appreciation and encouragement are given consistently by all teachers. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, the pupils were unanimous in the view that their teachers help them to learn and provide them with individual guidance.
- 3.16 In the EYFS, teaching is effective, exciting and enjoyable. The children clearly like their teachers, and are excited and motivated by the activities available and the warm, supportive relationships. This enables the children to make excellent progress in all the areas of learning. The children benefit from practitioners, including specialist teachers with extensive subject knowledge, who are all committed to high quality teaching and seek to improve development for those in their care.
- 3.17 Classroom assistants give effective support in many lessons. The IEPs are drawn up by the learning support staff in consultation with class and subject teachers and the pupils themselves, who clearly know their targets and understand what they need to do to improve. Opportunities for extending pupils' individual thinking and learning feature in many lessons.
- 3.18 Teaching is supported by a very good range of resources that are used to engage the pupils and enhance their enjoyment of learning. Many rooms, including for the EYFS, are equipped with interactive whiteboards, and these are used effectively. In the EYFS, high quality resources are used to support learning and teaching, making effective use of commercially produced and home-made materials. The music department is equipped with an excellent range of instruments, put to very good use. Portable word-processing keyboards are used to support less able writers, and the library is extremely well resourced and used extensively by all pupils.
- 3.19 A systematic marking strategy and consistency of marking help pupils to make progress and build on their achievements. The marking identifies clear steps for

improvement and provides for evaluative comment. In discussion with pupils of all ages, they commented on the helpfulness of teachers' marking. Teaching is well supported by assessment tools and testing systems, which are constantly reviewed to ensure that they measure accurately and enable optimum progress and attainment. Teachers in the EYFS use formal and informal assessment both to learn to about the children and to inform their teaching. An effective tracking system allows teachers to monitor the progress of individual pupils of all ages and to identify where extra support is required. Teachers are fully aware of the levels of attainment pupils must achieve to gain places or awards at the selective schools for which they are aiming.

## **4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **4.(a) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils**

- 4.1 The quality of the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is excellent.
- 4.2 The pupils' personal development reflects the school's aims to provide a stimulating, supportive environment that addresses all aspects of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and to promote excellence through equipping young people to accept responsibility and make a positive contribution to the community and society.
- 4.3 The development of the pupils' spiritual awareness is a strong feature of the school; pupils are confident and self-aware, able to appreciate non-material aspects of life. They are emotionally mature for their age. The pupils' were seen to empathise readily with the experiences of professional authors visiting the school as part of World Book Day. They appreciate the extensive and varied school grounds, including the newly created outdoor quiet area, known as The Hush. Children in the EYFS showed a sense of wonder when undertaking a hunt for gingerbread men in the school woodland.
- 4.4 The pupils have an extremely well-developed sense of right and wrong, respecting their peers and adults. They have a deep respect for the codes of good conduct expected of them from the earliest years. In the EYFS, children articulated social rules and the reasons for them. Pupils of all ages are proud of their school, understanding the moral and ethical values that permeate every area, reflected in wall displays, such as one on the theme of apartheid. Pupils of all ages explore moral issues in weekly PSHE lessons, 'circle time' and contemplative assemblies. Pupils discussed their views and explained them coherently during interviews, talking about recent PSHE lessons on how to be a good friend.
- 4.5 The pupils develop very well socially. They are able to accept responsibility and show initiative, contributing much to the school and the world beyond. In the EYFS, children have excellent relationships with adults and each other. They are able to wait for their turn patiently, to share and to listen to each other carefully. All pupils show kindness and consideration to one another, for example when younger pupils on a recent theatre trip appreciated that older ones had helped to look after them. A few Year 8 pupils are appointed as 'status' and carry out prefectural duties, older pupils at the reading club may be 'buddies' for younger pupils and some pupils serve as librarians. In the pupil pre-inspection questionnaire, a number of pupils said that opportunities for them to take responsibility are limited; the inspection findings confirmed this. Fund raising for international and more local good causes encourages the pupils to think of those less fortunate than themselves. Pupils develop political and economic awareness through PSHE and current affairs lessons.
- 4.6 Pupils clearly understand and respect other faiths and cultures. Lessons and activities underline this, promoting appreciation for and interest in a variety of cultures and traditions. Religious education and PSHE lessons, and many interesting displays around the school, reflect the wide range of cultural interests and activities — geographical, historical, religious, social and political — such as a history display about the First World War and a colourful display about the recent Chinese New Year.

- 4.7 By the time the pupils leave the school, the level of their personal development is very high.

#### **4.(b) The contribution of arrangements for pastoral care**

- 4.8 The arrangements for pastoral care are excellent.
- 4.9 Provision reflects the school's aims to provide an atmosphere that reflects purpose, order, consideration, tolerance and discipline within clearly set parameters, developing a school community that encourages responsibility, friendliness and care.
- 4.10 All adults work together to give the pupils extremely effective support and guidance. Relationships between staff and pupils and among the pupils themselves are relaxed and friendly, and teachers are committed and enthusiastic about their pastoral responsibilities, serving as excellent role models. A system of communication books, used as a record of homework and to relay messages between home and school, demonstrates the excellent care and interest shown by the staff.
- 4.11 Behaviour policies emphasise reward rather than disciplinary measures, and pupils nearly always show exemplary behaviour in lessons and around the school. Pupils commented on how easy it is to discuss a concern with their teachers, and knew that they would always receive help. For younger pupils, effective use is made of 'circle time' to reinforce positive behaviour and to talk about any concerns. In their pre-inspection questionnaire and in conversation with inspectors, pupils were appreciative of the care they receive.
- 4.12 In the EYFS, genuine concern for the individual child is always apparent, supported by policies to implement equality and eliminate discrimination. The school council allows pupils the opportunity to have a say in the life of their school, and although only newly formed, is already proving to be a useful forum. Posters designed by the pupils show that they are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles, such as going to bed early, and for the older pupils, considering the risks associated with smoking. Healthy eating is encouraged, and food is of a very high standard, with plenty of choice. Pupils are active, and new play equipment on the field provides an exciting way to exercise.
- 4.13 Considerable care is taken to provide help and support for pupils with disabilities. The requisite plan is in place to improve educational access for pupils with SEND.

#### **4.(c) The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety**

- 4.14 The provision made for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils is good.
- 4.15 The safeguarding policy is comprehensive, and after considerable revision it now reflects accurately current practice, following all statutory guidance. It is reviewed annually by senior managers and governors. All staff receive child protection training, which is updated with the required frequency. Health and safety procedures are good. Very effective measures are taken to reduce the risk of fire and other hazards, and records and documentation of all aspects of health and safety are meticulously kept. Useful risk assessments are now in place for all areas of the school and include external visits. The admission and attendance registers are maintained accurately and correctly archived.
- 4.16 Arrangements for sick or injured pupils are excellent and nursing staff provide exemplary care. Staff are very well informed about individual needs and conditions, including any pupils with SEND. Nursing staff are on duty throughout the school day, and many other staff are trained in first aid. Pupils develop a thorough understanding of the importance of choosing a healthy diet and participating in physical exercise. The catering staff have an excellent knowledge of nutrition, offering an extensive range of food to suit all tastes.
- 4.17 In the EYFS, children's health, safety and well-being are enhanced by the careful implementation of routines and procedures that the children follow confidently. They recognise the value of hygiene and are able to articulate the reason for various safety rules. The safeguarding of children's welfare is carefully ensured. All adults involved in the EYFS provision are aware of their responsibilities and the statutory requirements.

#### **4.(d) The quality of boarding**

- 4.18 The quality of the provision for boarding is excellent.
- 4.19 Outcomes for boarders are excellent, contributing very effectively to the school's aims to maintain an environment in which they are safe, happy and motivated, and to encourage mutual respect, tolerance and understanding. The rapport between boarders and staff is extremely strong, promoting a most caring and harmonious atmosphere that is evident throughout the school community. Behaviour in the boarding house is exemplary. Boarders mix well and strongly support one another; they value the camaraderie and friendships they make. Those with SEND feel that they are well supported and respected as individuals, and inspection findings confirm this. Staff are particularly knowledgeable about boarders' individual needs, and demonstrate a strong commitment to improving outcomes for those in their care. Boarders benefit greatly from the secure and sympathetic routines that have been established in the boarding house. They respond well to responsibilities and opportunities to contribute to boarding life, and they feel that they are acquiring useful skills for the future in fulfilling these. Established boarders happily support any new boarders as a key part of the induction process. Potential boarders have the opportunity to try a few nights of boarding in a previous term before a commitment is made. In discussion, boarders reported that they are able to express their views directly to the boarding staff and have opportunities to suggest ways to make further improvements to boarding life. They are extremely well prepared for the next stage of their education and look forward to increasing independence and responsibility.

- 4.20 The quality of boarding provision and care is excellent. Relationships within the boarding community at all levels are outstanding. Throughout the inspection, boarders and members of staff were observed working together in a friendly but professional manner and enjoying the company of each other. Pupils speak extremely highly of and with affection for the staff who work in the boarding house. Boarding staff ensure the health and well-being of the boarders, and care plans are well formulated and suitably implemented. All the boarders are eager to join in the many activities that are available during the evening. These activities, whilst encouraging the development of numerous different skills, allow for self-directed time and freedom of choice. Some pursuits, such as the highly popular graffiti art activity, are available only to boarders. The boarders bring bicycles and scooters to school and have ample space outdoors to enjoy their use, resulting in much healthy exercise. Boarding accommodation is warm and comfortable, with pleasant facilities that are now well maintained, including a sitting room, a games room and washroom provision. The well-resourced medical centre has well-trained, professional staff, and offers a warm and caring environment for the boarders. Without exception, the boarders spoke highly of the plentiful, varied and nutritious food, which provides for individual dietary needs. The views of the boarders and ideas for new additions to the menu are sought during regular meetings with the catering staff. Drinking water is available at all times, and snacks are available at appropriate intervals during the day. Boarders maintain regular contact with their families, and they all go home every weekend. The school communicates with parents, carers and guardians through email, phone calls and regular direct contact.
- 4.21 The effectiveness of the arrangements for welfare and safeguarding in boarding is excellent. After a number of recent revisions, the school's safeguarding policy is now comprehensive and is implemented well, including the training of staff. All risks for boarders within the boarding house and around the school site have now been assessed and highlighted with appropriate signage; detailed risk assessments for fire safety are clear, and regular fire practices are carried out in boarding time, including when the boarders are asleep. New staff are made aware of boarding procedures as part of their induction. Links between boarding and academic staff are strong, enabling any minor concerns and issues to be discussed informally, and recorded when necessary. The boarders feel very safe within the boarding community; the school's anti-bullying procedures are clear, with underlying principles based upon respect, tolerance and consideration for the feelings and comfort of others. Boarders overwhelmingly reported no experience of bullying and were unanimous in their confidence that they know who to turn to if they have any concerns. In addition to those at school, an external listener is available, and boarders are confident that they will be listened to and supported. The policy and procedures to promote good behaviour are securely in place, with a comprehensive system of rewards and sanctions, clearly understood by boarders.
- 4.22 The quality of the leadership and management of boarding is excellent. This fulfils the boarding aims of the school to provide a safe and healthy, comfortable and happy environment where pupils who choose to board may feel they have a home from home. This is evident from the smooth running of the boarding house and the positive atmosphere that is apparent throughout. The management of care is well co-ordinated and effectively responds to the boarders' needs and views. While confident in maintaining these high standards of care, staff are not complacent and continue to consider ways to improve even further. The boarding staff work well as a team, and communication, although informal, is extremely effective. A comprehensive induction programme ensures that all new staff fully understand

relevant policies and procedures. In their responses to the questionnaires, parents were highly appreciative of the care and support their children receive, a view strongly endorsed by inspection findings. The previous Ofsted boarding inspection report made no recommendations for improvement.

## **5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

### **5.(a) The quality of governance**

- 5.1 The quality of governance is good.
- 5.2 The governing body provides good oversight of all sections of the school. This is in line with aims to promote excellence through equipping young people to accept responsibility and make a positive contribution to the community and society, and to maintain an environment in which pupils are safe, happy and motivated.
- 5.3 The previous inspection report made a recommendation that mechanisms should be established to ensure that all governors are appropriately familiar with the school, its staff and its workings, and be involved in its educational development. This has been fully met; governors now visit the school more frequently. With a number of new appointments to the board, many governors are parents of former or current pupils, or are former pupils, and have an in-depth knowledge of the school. The governing body now has a broadened range of specialist skills, contributing to effective discharge of its responsibilities for educational standards, financial planning and investment in staff, accommodation and resources.
- 5.4 This has enabled the governing body to increase the effectiveness of its insight into the working of the school and to begin to exercise a monitoring role. This involves providing support, challenge and stimulus for growth and improvement, particularly in the EYFS, where children themselves are familiar with governors because of their regular help with reading and classroom support. Development planning is well advanced, including the imminent provision of a girls' boarding house. This meets the recommendation of the previous inspection report to improve development planning, including prioritising, costing, how objectives are to be achieved and success criteria.
- 5.5 The governing body is now effective in discharging its responsibilities for statutory requirements, including the annual review of safeguarding and child protection arrangements throughout the school; in the past this review had lacked rigour. Any historic deficiencies did not place children at risk.

### **5.(b) The quality of leadership and management, including links with parents, carers and guardians**

- 5.6 The quality of leadership and management and of links with parents, carers and guardians is excellent.
- 5.7 The school is led in accordance with the aim to provide the greatest opportunities for personal and professional growth for all who live and work in it. At all levels of responsibility, the leadership and management of the school are effective with regard to delegated responsibilities. Policies are implemented as intended, and with recent updating now reflect more accurately actual practices within the school; the safeguarding of pupils has due prominence. Those with leadership and management responsibilities provide clear educational direction, as reflected in the high quality of the pupils' education and the excellent standard of their personal development. The transition for the school to become fully co-educational is being managed effectively and sympathetically.

- 5.8 The previous inspection report made recommendations to improve the monitoring of teaching and learning through lesson observation by both the senior management team and heads of department so that pupils' achievement is raised further, and to formalise the performance management process, linking it to staff professional needs. These recommendations have been fully implemented, and teachers spoke highly of their appreciation of the formal appraisal system and the less formal opportunities for peer review. Leadership and management are effective in self-evaluation, setting priorities and ensuring that they are achieved. Systems for pastoral care and welfare, health and safety are carefully monitored, including those affecting boarders and children in the EYFS.
- 5.9 Management at all levels is successful in securing, supporting, developing and motivating sufficient high quality staff and ensuring that they are suitably trained for their roles in meeting the needs of all pupils. Members of staff often attend individual training courses when relevant, and then report to colleagues on the effectiveness of the training. In addition, whole-staff training is provided, for example with a recent useful session on effective pupil tracking. Classroom support staff are encouraged to follow training courses, and a number of them have achieved nationally recognised qualifications to enhance their work in school. All appointments of staff and volunteers follow scrupulously the principles of safer recruitment, and the necessary checks are appropriately recorded in a central register and individual files.
- 5.10 Children's needs are met and managed well in the EYFS, where clear progress is evident in all areas, particularly in numeracy and literacy where improvement is measured against baseline assessments. All involved in this section of the school have a clear vision and show a particular enthusiasm for provision for this age group. All EYFS practitioners show the capacity to make continuous improvement and to sustain the existing high standards. In the EYFS, the safeguarding of children is carefully ensured, policies and procedures are implemented to promote equality and eliminate discrimination, and the management of resources is effective.
- 5.11 The school has established excellent links with parents, carers and guardians, in accordance with its aim to promote constructive and amiable relationships between staff, pupils and home so that a mutual respect is developed and positively reinforced, leading to the notion that learning is fun. In the pre-inspection questionnaires, the overwhelming majority of parents who responded were enthusiastic about the school and the opportunities they have to discuss their children's progress or any concerns. Parents new to the school are provided with comprehensive information through the prospectus, handbooks, and open days and tours. Pupils visit the school to meet their future teachers and classmates.
- 5.12 Parents are encouraged to approach teachers about any concerns, and the wide-ranging website provides access to requisite information about policies and procedures and about school events and activities. Parents speak highly of the EYFS and are pleased with the level of information they receive about their children. They help their children by hearing them read, and in addition provide them with books and posters relating to current topics. Parents use the communication books to inform teachers of day-to-day arrangements, and clearly value the part this plays in promoting the care that their children receive.
- 5.13 A programme of regular parents' evenings and informative reports is in place to give details of individual progress, and from the questionnaire responses it is clear that these are highly valued.

- 5.14 Parents are invited into school for such events as 'open lunch' weeks, and they attend sports fixtures, plays and concerts. The active Friends of Birchfield Association has a programme of fund raising and popular social events. The Parents' Forum enables general concerns and suggestions to be raised with the school, and its deliberations are published to all parents. The Friday newsletter is highly valued for its recognition of the successes of the current week and comprehensive coverage of forthcoming events. In addition to extra-curricular activities for pupils, the school provides evening clubs for parents. The art and book clubs are popular and well attended.

**What the school should do to improve is given at the beginning of the report in section 2.**