



**ISI** Independent  
Schools  
Inspectorate

**REGULATORY COMPLIANCE INSPECTION REPORT**

**BIRKENHEAD SCHOOL**

**NOVEMBER 2017**



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## SCHOOL'S DETAILS

<b>School</b>	Birkenhead			
<b>DfE number</b>	344/6023			
<b>Registered charity number</b>	1093419			
<b>Address</b>	The Lodge 58 Beresford Road Oxton, Wirral CH43 2JD			
<b>Telephone number</b>	0151 652 4014			
<b>Email address</b>	enquire@birkenheadschool.co.uk			
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr. Paul Vicars			
<b>Chair of governors</b>	Mr. Andrew Cross			
<b>Age range</b>	3 months to 18			
<b>Number of pupils on roll</b>	799			
	<b>Boys</b>	479	<b>Girls</b>	320
	<b>Day pupils</b>	799	<b>Boarders</b>	0
	<b>EYFS</b>	115	<b>Prep</b>	281
	<b>Seniors</b>	306	<b>Sixth Form</b>	97
<b>Inspection dates</b>	29 to 30 November 2017			

## **1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### **About the School**

- 1.1 Birkenhead School is an independent co-educational day school for pupils from three months to 18 years. The school is a charitable company limited by guarantee and governed by a board of directors who are also trustees.
- 1.2 Since 2013 a number of new governors have been appointed including a new chair of governors. The headmaster has been in office since September 2016.
- 1.3 The school was established in 1860 and became fully co-educational in 2008. The school has strong links to the Church of England although there is a wide range of faiths and nationalities within the community. The school is divided into the Nursery, which takes children from three months to three years, and the Prep which includes the Pre-Prep, Reception and Years 1 to 6. The Senior school is for Years 7 to 13.

### **What the school seeks to do**

- 1.4 Birkenhead is a school which seeks to provide an open and happy community in which endeavour and achievement flourish; which offers a well-proven route to academic success, seeking to enable pupils to realise their potential and prepare them for later life; which creates a caring and structured environment in which pupils can grow in self-confidence and which sets high standards for itself and for its pupils.

### **About the pupils**

- 1.5 Pupils come from a range of backgrounds and ethnicities, across the whole of Wirral, Cheshire, the wider Merseyside area and North Wales. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicates that the ability of the pupils in the prep is above average, and broadly average in the senior school. The school's assessment identifies 91 pupils as having special educational needs or disabilities (SEND), including dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia, Irlen's syndrome and a range of other needs. There is one pupil with an educational health and care plan. There are 21 pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) of whom 11 receive additional support. The school does not identify pupils who are more able but offers opportunities to stretch and challenge those who have particular talents.

## 2. REGULATORY COMPLIANCE INSPECTION

### Preface

The registration authority for independent schools is the Department for Education (DfE), which directs inspection according to a specified frequency or at any time where the DfE has particular concerns about a school. The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and reporting on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Accordingly, inspection records whether the school meets each of these standards, which are arranged in eight Parts, each of which is divided into separate paragraphs. The inspection of schools that have early years settings not requiring registration similarly records whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework, and for registered settings the full range of the Early Years Foundation Stage provisions is considered. Additionally, the inspection reports on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

All association independent schools will have an inspection within three years from April 2016, in accordance with the Framework and DfE requirements. The inspection may be of COMPLIANCE ONLY or a combined inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND COMPLIANCE depending on a number of factors, including findings from their most recent inspection. Schools judged not to meet the standards may also be subject to a progress monitoring visit before their next routine inspection. The progress monitoring visit will judge whether the school has taken the necessary action to meet any un-met standards identified at their previous inspection.

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

**This is a COMPLIANCE ONLY inspection and as such reports only on the school's compliance with the standards.** The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the full regulations and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), [Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#).

## Key Findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, the requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.

### **PART 1 – Quality of education provided**

- 2.2 In the prep, the school uses its own framework to determine attainment, instead of the national framework.
- 2.3 At GCSE in the years 2014 to 2016, performance has been above the national average for maintained schools and in line with the national average for maintained selective schools. Results in the international GCSE (IGCSE) have been higher than worldwide norms.
- 2.4 In the sixth form, A-level results in the years 2014 to 2016 have been above the national average for sixth formers in maintained schools and above the national average for maintained selective schools.
- 2.5 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.6 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

### **PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**

- 2.7 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.8 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

### **PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

- 2.9 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.10 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.**

### **PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors**

- 2.11 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors and a register is kept as required.
- 2.12 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.**

## **PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools**

2.13 Suitable toilet, changing and showering facilities for pupils and appropriate accommodation for their medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.

**2.14 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.**

## **PART 6 – Provision of information**

2.15 A range of information is variously published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. These include details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for those with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. They also include particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, and its results in public examinations, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.

**2.16 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.**

## **PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled**

2.17 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.

**2.18 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.**

## **PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools**

2.19 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.

**2.20 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.**

## **THE QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE**

### **Overall effectiveness: the quality and standards of the early years provision**

- 2.21 The overall effectiveness of the early years provision is outstanding.
- 2.22 Exciting learning opportunities and dedicated and nurturing staff ensure that children make good, and at times rapid, progress relative to their starting points and are carefully prepared for transition into the next stage of learning. Leaders oversee planning and tracking to ensure that all children's needs are met effectively. Staff provide high quality learning experiences for the children to meet their next steps. Where children are identified as exceeding expectations, staff utilise other resources in the setting to provide challenge and promote further learning. Skilled staff seize opportunities to extend children's thinking through child initiated and focused group activities. Support is put in place in the form of a 'play plan' for children whose progress is not as expected. Staff work in partnership with parents to establish the next steps and these are reviewed regularly.
- 2.23 Children are exceptionally happy and secure in the setting benefiting from the strong bonds they form with their key workers and other staff in the room.
- 2.24 The requirements for children's safeguarding are fully met. Staff are aware of their responsibility in keeping children safe and always ensure a secure environment.
- 2.25 The leadership and management team have effective systems in place to ensure regular evaluation of the setting and continuous improvement. This ensures that children are given the best possible care when they start the setting.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management**

- 2.26 The effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding.
- 2.27 Leaders have a clear vision evident through a detailed development plan, and are committed to continuous improvement and ensuring high standards of care for children. Clear procedures are in place to ensure progress is monitored and tracked to meet the high standards that are set. Staff are exceptionally knowledgeable and work together extremely well to provide opportunities for children to reach their potential.
- 2.28 Through a regular supervision and appraisal system, staff have opportunities to identify areas for development and recently a member of staff who showed an interest in developing maths in the EYFS has been on a course for maths in the outdoors.
- 2.29 Staff meetings and weekly evaluations provide opportunities for self-evaluation and leaders act on these findings to continually improve practice and outcomes for the children. Parents are asked for feedback at each stage of transition and when they leave the nursery, this highlights what the setting does well and any areas to improve.
- 2.30 Highly skilled and committed staff ensure learning programmes meet the needs and interest of the children and plan activities that enthuse and motivate them to learn. Leaders oversee planning to ensure it meets statutory requirements and there is a strong focus on the prime areas of learning for the youngest children. Baseline assessments and careful tracking confirm that children are making progress and allow staff to plan next steps that extend children's learning and development.
- 2.31 The setting actively promotes British values, equality and diversity in its everyday practice. There is a strong emphasis on sharing, being kind to one another and taking turns. Staff promote good manners and children were encouraged to say 'please' and 'thank you' at mealtimes.



- 2.32 Children's safety is a priority and the setting meets the safeguarding and welfare requirements. Leaders ensure staff read and understand up-to-date policies and are fully aware of statutory regulations.
- 2.33 In response to pre-inspection questionnaires, and in discussions, parents expressed very positive views about the setting. Parents commented on how well the staff know their children, the excellent progress their children make and the homely, safe and secure environment that staff create for children.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

- 2.34 The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding.
- 2.35 All staff have high expectations of what children can achieve and strive to ensure expectations are met. Staff are extremely knowledgeable of the age group they are working with and provide activities that promote learning at every opportunity. They provide a rich and varied range of activities that encourage children to develop skills in all areas of learning and children were seen catching bubbles, exploring texture whilst playing with feathers and playing 'boo' using a parachute. Careful and well-timed interactions extend the children's learning experience but staff allow children the opportunity to develop independence and perseverance. Children were observed trying to put their own shoes on, threading beads and climbing steps up the slide. Children show exceptional levels of focus for learning and the youngest children were observed engrossed in activities, such as singing nursery rhymes with staff, looking at sound books and filling containers whilst playing in the sand pit.
- 2.36 Baseline assessments are completed when children start at the setting and are used effectively to plan children's next steps. Children's learning journals provide an overview of a child's point of development through a collection of photographic observations, although age related expectations are not included alongside these. Regular summative assessments provide a detailed summary of a child's progress with clear next steps. Termly tracking is monitored by the setting's leadership and ensures staff provide challenge for those children who are exceeding expectations. Support, in the form of a 'play plan' is implemented if a child is identified as not making expected progress in any area. An effective 'play plan' was observed in place during the inspection.
- 2.37 High priority is given to developing children's communication skills and staff are extremely skilled at interacting with children at every opportunity to develop their speech and language. During lunchtime children were seen pointing to each friend in turn and saying their names. Staff modelled language so children could carefully repeat names of their peers and staff. Photographs of children are attached to their water beakers, so children can name themselves and their friends when finding their own beaker.
- 2.38 Parents are well informed of children's learning through a monthly newsletter that offers suggestions as to how parents can support children's learning at home. Curriculum information is given to parents when they join the setting and parents are encouraged to speak to staff if they need any other information. 'Precious moments' offer parents the opportunity to share with staff any special occasions, celebrations or achievements that have taken place at home. These are then shared with children and staff. Three times a year staff meet with parents to talk through children's summative assessments and parents can comment on their child's progress and next steps. Home communication books and an open-door policy provide effective daily communication.
- 2.39 High quality teaching supports children to learn and develop effectively. Children display high levels of confidence and independence and a carefully managed transition process ensures they are well prepared for the next stage of learning.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

- 2.40 Personal development, behaviour and welfare are outstanding.
- 2.41 There is a strong commitment to learning across the setting. Staff act as excellent role models, encouraging the children to express their needs, participate and share. Children respond extremely positively to staff and are enthusiastic and confident within their environment. Staff create a stimulating and nurturing environment where the youngest children feel safe and secure but are inspired by well-chosen accessible resources, and the encouragement of staff, to explore what is around them. Young children were seen crawling with interest around the room and children happily walk between the two rooms to explore what is on offer. Children demonstrate an interest in learning which is developed by staff who select activities and resources that capture their enthusiasm. Young children were observed gazing in wonder as coloured light was shone on the walls and ceiling. Older children were enthusiastically naming animals and the sounds associated with them, and staff skilfully supported some children's speaking skills, whilst challenging the children who could name 'penguin' and said it 'waddled'.
- 2.42 Children's well-being is a strength of the setting. Staff form warm, secure relationships with the children in their care and as a result, young children are happy and show high levels of confidence and enjoyment. Staff aim to provide a sleep routine that is similar to a child's home, so children can sleep in cots, pods, prams and on mats, with comforters and their favourite blankets. Children were seen happily settling down to sleep and being comforted by staff when they'd woken up.
- 2.43 Staff ensure children are prepared for transition and key workers will support children initially in exploring their next environment. Children can gradually spend time in the toddler room and settling-in sessions allow them to form a bond with their new key worker before they move up.
- 2.44 Children's behaviour is exceptional. They demonstrate high levels of self-control and co-operation for their age. Staff support children in how to keep themselves safe. Children were seen being warned to stand back as a staff member opened a door.
- 2.45 Children are offered nutritious home cooked meals and were observed eating extremely well. Older children were able to independently feed themselves with a fork or spoon and were praised and encouraged by staff.
- 2.46 Children are encouraged to show respect for each other and the staff are excellent role models for this. Children are made aware of British values in an age-appropriate manner, already preparing them for life ahead.

## Outcomes for children

- 2.47 Outcomes for children are outstanding.
- 2.48 All children, including those with SEND and EAL, make good rates of progress in relation to their starting points. Effective tracking and use of observations and assessment data ensures children receive the necessary support or challenge, to prepare them for the next stage of learning.
- 2.49 Children develop their confidence and physical skills as staff provide opportunities for babies to develop their crawling techniques and then gain confidence in walking as they reach that stage. Older children use ride on toys and climb steps up the slide unaided. Staff constantly repeat and model words and phrases to develop all children's language skills. Consequently, children are able to communicate what they would like and young children can express themselves effectively to staff.
- 2.50 Staff regularly use songs and rhymes to actively engage children. Children watch staff and enjoy interacting with actions or sounds they can repeat.
- 2.51 A wide range of resources allow children opportunities for exploration. Young children were seen painting with brushes, mark making with egg shaped crayons, swirling coloured sound and playing 'boo' with sequinned material. Older children were observed developing fine motor skills with chalks,

placing pegs in peg board and doing jigsaws. Children show an interest in number and try to join in as staff count blocks in a tower and spacemen from a song.

### **Compliance with statutory requirements**

**2.52 The school's registered provision for childcare meets the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 and no action is required.**

### **Recommendation for further improvement**

The school is advised to make the following improvements to its provision for children in the early years.

- Ensure age related expectations are used more consistently in observation and assessment data.

## **4. INSPECTION EVIDENCE**

- 4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with a group of governors including the chair, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings and chapel. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

### **Inspectors**

Mr Gareth Price

Reporting inspector

Miss Vicky Plenderleith

Co-ordinating inspector (EYFS)

Mr Carl Billson

Compliance Team inspector (HMC school)