



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Reports

Birchfield School

November 2021

Contents

School's Details	3
1. Background Information	4
About the school	4
What the school seeks to do	4
About the pupils	4
2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection	5
Preface	5
Key findings	6
PART 1 – Quality of education provided	6
PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils	6
PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils	6
PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors	6
PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools	7
PART 6 – Provision of information	7
PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled	7
PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools	7
3. Educational Quality Inspection	8
Preface	8
Key findings	8
Recommendation	8
The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements	8
The quality of the pupils' personal development	10
4. Inspection Evidence	13

School's Details

School	Birchfield School			
DfE number	893/6014			
Address	Birchfield School Harriott's Hayes Lane Albrighton Wolverhampton West Midlands WV7 3AF			
Telephone number	01902 372534			
Email address	office@birchfieldschool.co.uk			
Headmistress	Mrs Sarah Morris			
Proprietor	St Philips Educational Holdings Limited			
Age range	4 to 13			
Number of pupils on roll	138			
	EYFS	13	Juniors	112
	Seniors	13		
Inspection dates	16 to 19 November 2021			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Birchfield School is a co-educational day school. Established in 1935 as a preparatory school, it moved in 1962 to its present rural site near Albrighton in Shropshire. The school is based in an Edwardian country house and purpose-built modern buildings, set in woods, gardens and playing fields. In November 2020, the school joined the proprietary body, St Philips Education Group, and now operates as Birchfield School Limited. An educational advisory group supports the proprietor in overseeing the work of the school. The school is expanding to take pupils up to Year 11 in 2023.
- 1.2 During the period March to August 2020, the whole school remained open only for children of key workers. During this period of closure the school provided remote learning materials for all pupils.
- 1.3 In the interests of infection control during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, inspection evidence was gathered partly remotely and partly on site to reduce contact within the school setting.
- 1.4 In line with the direction given by the Department for Education (DfE) at the time, no evaluation has been made of the nature or effectiveness of any provision made during the period March to August 2020, including its impact on pupils' learning, achievement or personal development. Any concerns relating to pupils' welfare during this period which directly relate to measures implemented by the school have been considered.
- 1.5 During the lockdown period of January to March 2021, all pupils other than the children of key workers or vulnerable pupils received remote learning provision at home.
- 1.6 Since 2020, EYFS profiles have not been externally moderated.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.7 The school aims to produce confident, happy and independent pupils who have fulfilled their all-round potential and have developed a lifelong love of learning. It seeks to provide a stimulating, supportive environment, which prioritises the importance of good manners, kindness and respect.

About the pupils

- 1.8 Pupils come from families with a range of professional backgrounds living within a 15-mile radius of the school. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils in the prep section is broadly average, although with variation both within and across year groups. The number of pupils requiring support for special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is 14. There are three pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Most pupils with SEND have dyslexia and related learning difficulties. There are no pupils for whom English is an additional language. Pupils identified by the school as being the most able in its population have the curriculum modified for them, and additional activities are available for those with special talents in the arts and sport.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Inspections of schools with early years settings not requiring registration also report 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, inspections report 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. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The FOCUSED COMPLIANCE inspection 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. In this focused compliance inspection, key standards have been inspected in detail. These are the standards on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety; arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

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

COVID-19: Inspection judgements do not cover the period March to August 2020 inclusive.

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, and relevant 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 The school's own framework for assessment confirms that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 Pupils receive relationships education in the junior part of the school and relationships and sex education in the senior part of the school, except in so far as they are lawfully excused. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.5 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

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

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

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.8 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.
- 2.9 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

- 2.10 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.11 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

2.12 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' 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.

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

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.14 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes 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 any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, 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.

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

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.16 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.

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

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.18 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.

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

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The **EDUCATIONAL QUALITY** inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

The headline judgements apply one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Key findings

3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.

- Pupils have extremely positive attitudes to learning and are hardworking and resilient.
- Pupils are excellent communicators; they are highly articulate and confident speakers, and listen and respond maturely.
- Pupils have excellent knowledge, skills and understanding and achieve highly in both academic and other areas.
- Higher order thinking skills, such as devising hypotheses, analysing and synthesising data are not developed consistently across all subjects and years.

3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.

- Pupils' moral understanding is highly developed, and they show an empathetic understanding of, and respect for, other cultures.
- Pupils' social development and collaboration skills are excellent and relationships with each other are warm and positive.
- Throughout the school pupils demonstrate a high level of self-understanding, self-confidence, self-discipline and resilience.

Recommendation

3.3 In the context of the excellent outcomes, the school might wish to consider how it could develop pupils' thinking skills further by providing increased opportunities for independent thought, analysis and synthesis of ideas.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.

3.5 Throughout the school pupils make excellent progress over time and achieve highly in all areas. This was confirmed through lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' work, and the school's own assessment data. Pupils have enjoyed considerable success in recent years gaining places and scholarships at their first choice of senior school, many of which have rigorous academic selection criteria. In the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), all children make rapid progress in relation to their age and development, so that the majority attain well above national age-related expectations by the end of Reception. Next steps in learning are clearly identified and shared with pupils and parents to ensure a cohesive approach. Pupils with SEND make equally good progress, and often outperform expectations, thanks in part to effective specialist support they receive. Excellent progress was seen in most lessons;

for example, children in the EYFS rapidly assimilated the correct names for 3D shapes such as cones, cylinders, cubes and spheres, while young pre-prep pupils quickly learned how to subtract 2-digit numbers from other 2-digit numbers. Older pupils showed a very good grasp of descriptive language and the use of metaphor and simile when writing an essay on 'Animal Farm'. Pupils' progress is enhanced throughout the school by the very detailed and thorough tracking and monitoring systems that enable teachers to tailor teaching and tasks to individual needs. All parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire agreed that the range of subjects provided is suitable and that teaching enables pupils to learn and make progress.

- 3.6 Pupils develop excellent knowledge, skills and understanding across all areas of learning, including aesthetic and creative education in response to the well-planned and broad curriculum. In the EYFS, children made excellent progress in distinguishing 'sh' sounds and were able to apply these in sentences, while in a religious education (RE) lesson older pupils discussed maturely whether the story of Moses in the basket was believable. In almost all teaching, well chosen, challenging tasks and probing questions, all informed by strong subject knowledge, encourage pupils to think deeply about issues. Pupils value the detailed oral feedback provided by teachers, and most feel that this support and encouragement helps them to become better learners and know how to improve in their work. Inspection evidence supports this view. Pupils show a good understanding of their previous learning and are encouraged to apply this knowledge to new situations. For example, in a Year 5 class all pupils built upon previous knowledge to play a repeated pattern using a djembe drum in music, showing adeptness and technical skill. Pupils' progress during the recent COVID-19 restrictions has been good due to the quality of the school's provision for remote learning. In the questionnaires, all parents agreed that the school benefits from strong governance, leadership and management. This contributes to the success of the pupils by creating an ethos which supports and encourages pupils and staff in the pursuit of academic success. Almost all pupils agree that their skills and knowledge improve in lessons and that teachers help them learn.
- 3.7 Communication skills throughout the school are excellent. Pupils are confident and articulate speakers, and enthusiastically embrace opportunities for public speaking, whether it be in presenting sports reports in assemblies, delivering speeches they have prepared as part of the process for selection onto the school council, or in drama. Pupils read well and this skill is promoted in the daily reading period. Pupils enjoy selecting both fiction and non-fiction books from the well used library. Reception children have a good understanding of the sounds letters make and their writing and speaking skills develop rapidly as they grow in confidence and maturity. Pupils write fluently in a range of genres. Young prep school pupils, for example, were adept at using correct speech dialogue punctuation when describing different types of snow and the effects this had upon their chosen characters. As pupils progress through the school, they write with increasing fluency and sophistication, so that the eldest pupils can use sophisticated adjectives, adverbs, metaphors and similes to create an eerie atmosphere when describing a hostile location. Pupils use technical language confidently and competently, whether it be younger prep school pupils using appropriate mathematical terms such as triangles, squares or crescents to explain their choice of shape, or older pupils using the correct terminology in geography to describe the different stages of development through which countries go.
- 3.8 Pupils are very competent mathematicians, successfully using their excellent calculation skills both in mathematics and across the curriculum. Children in the EYFS were observed to count with confidence beyond 10 and to add and subtract and recognise written numbers. Prep school pupils demonstrated excellent long and short division skills, while the oldest were adept at solving algebraic problems and could explain their working clearly. More able mathematicians compete with success in national mathematical competitions. Pupils are comfortable using their skills across a wide range of other subjects. For example, younger pupils used a tape to precisely measure their height, while older pupils weighed ingredients in Food Technology and drew graphs accurately. Older pupils used their mathematical skills very well when computing the weight of 1kg of rice in newtons both on the earth and on the moon.

- 3.9 Pupils of all ages competently use a broad range of ICT skills, as well as specific computing skills such as coding. The range and complexity of their skills increase as they move through the school. Younger prep school pupils hugely enjoy using a computer programme to test their knowledge of times tables and in music they confidently use the computer to create their own compositions using a programme where shapes represent different instruments. Older pupils are adept at using spreadsheets and can create and embed graphs within text. Pupils' use of ICT for remote learning has strengthened their familiarity with a range of programmes and consolidated their ICT skills.
- 3.10 The development of study skills is inconsistent throughout the school. In English, pupils are given many opportunities for free writing and they greatly enjoy this and show excellent imagination, a wide vocabulary and accurate use of grammar. Comprehension exercises provide pupils with the chance to develop their analytical skills. In history, pupils in Year 7 did some excellent independent work, evaluating source material, and then writing a well-reasoned justification for who had the strongest claim to the throne of England in 1066. However, in other subjects, opportunities for pupils to develop their study skills are rare resulting in pupils being less capable in independent research and free writing. Where higher order thinking skills such as devising hypotheses, analysing and synthesising data are less well developed, this is because teaching is often too closely directed by the teacher.
- 3.11 Pupils are successful in an extensive range of creative and physical pursuits and are supported in their achievements by the wide-ranging extra-curricular programme, good sports facilities, and specialist sports coaching. Teachers' encouragement and challenge empower pupils' achievements through enrichment activities. Pupils are successful in individual external music examinations. Drama is an important part of school life with many pupils enjoying success in speech and drama exams and in school plays. School teams of all ages are successful in a variety of local and national competitions, and exceptionally talented pupils represent regional and county teams in a range of sports, including hockey, cricket, and football. Teams have also won awards in a variety of more academic pursuits, such as mathematics challenges.
- 3.12 From the earliest age, pupils are enthusiastic and ambitious learners, with a genuine desire to succeed. They are curious and willing to learn new skills, and not afraid to take risks; they recognise that making mistakes is part of the learning process. They are resilient and confident in the classroom, approaching every task willingly and with high degrees of motivation. Mutual support between pupils is a strong feature of the school. Children in the EYFS greatly enjoyed honing their fine motor skills, by pouring drinks, and wrapping and labelling presents for Birchfield Bear's birthday party. In tennis club, pupils worked harmoniously in pairs to improve their serving skills, taking turns to support each other. Throughout the school pupils challenge each other's ideas in a constructive way whilst being supportive and respectful of one another's views. A scrutiny of work from pupils across the school showed that all work was neatly presented and kept in a very orderly manner, clearly labelled and thus aiding revision.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 Throughout the school pupils demonstrate high levels of self-confidence and self-understanding. They are helped in this by constructive marking and helpful oral feedback from their teachers. Pupils of all ages are very aware of where they are in their learning, and older pupils' responses to written marking reveals that they know the steps they need to take in order to improve their own learning and performance. For example, older pupils are expected to undertake a quality check of their written work prior to submission. Pupils show perseverance and determination in their work, as was seen in a Reception lesson where children honed their fine motor skills by using tweezers to pick up pompoms, and in a junior mathematics lesson where pupils persevered well when learning to multiply four-digit numbers by two digits.

- 3.15 Pupils practise their decision-making skills from an early age with Reception children able to select which activity they will do, while in a mathematics lesson older pupils successfully chose the level of challenge they would attempt, enabling them all to make strong progress. Over time they become adept at making choices and are increasingly aware of the ramifications of their choices. In an enrichment lesson, pupils demonstrated a mature understanding of how decisions made long ago have led to pollution and climate warming. They understood that choices made now will affect the planet in the future. Pupils worked with staff and governors to agree a pupil code of conduct, the 'Birchfield Way', which emphasises the values of diligence, respect, kindness, aspiration, resilience and pride.
- 3.16 Pupils have a deep spiritual awareness and develop a good understanding of the world's major religions through a strong RE and personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme, as well as regular assemblies. Pupils consider philosophical and ethical concepts; for example, younger children spoke knowledgeably of the importance of kindness and older pupils commented on how tutor time encourages them to consider spiritual and moral issues; for example in PSHE when pupils considered the dilemma between doing the right thing or the thing which benefited them personally. Pupils have a strong appreciation of the non-material aspects of school life. Younger pupils enjoy the opportunities afforded them in the woodland learning environment which increases their understanding of nature. Pupils of all ages demonstrate a passion for the environment and an appreciation of their own surroundings through the thriving eco committee.
- 3.17 Pupils are highly self-disciplined, and their personal development is characterised by excellent standards of behaviour and respect, both for each other and for staff. In interviews pupils reported that there is hardly any bullying, and that when relationship issues arise between pupils, the school's effective support systems help them to swiftly resolve them. Pupils develop strong relationships derived from the ethos of the school which is based on mutual respect. This is demonstrated in the relationships observed between pupils of different ages, as observed when older pre-prep pupils hold the hands of younger children as they walk together to play outside after lunch. Pupils have a clear understanding of right and wrong and take responsibility for their own behaviour. All parents and pupils agreed that the school actively promotes and expects good behaviour. Pupils are polite and well-mannered; they support and understand the school rules and behaviour policy. The development of their moral values begins in pre-school where children learn to understand school and class rules, share, take turns and be polite to staff and each other.
- 3.18 Pupils' social awareness is excellent, and this helps to create an extremely harmonious and happy community. Children in the EYFS were observed socialising happily, working well with others and solving problems together; for example swapping implements and materials when wrapping Christmas presents. This is engendered by the school culture which encourages relaxed relationships and social confidence. Pupils collaborate well in every aspect of school life, both in lessons and elsewhere. They acquire excellent social skills through the many opportunities the school provides to engage with others in joint ventures. Pupils were frequently observed supporting their peers; for example, during assembly they listened respectfully while a group of four pupils sang to the rest of the school. In interviews, pupils spoke of a caring, supportive and happy community in which they show real, genuine concern for each other. Pupils spoke very positively about working together as a team in sports competitions, and in most lessons pupils were seen to work collaboratively to good effect. For example, Reception children co-operated to build rockets using 3D shapes, while older pupils worked extremely well in teams, measuring and weighing ingredients to produce a Christmas cake. All parents, in the questionnaire, agreed that the school equips their child with the team working and social skills they need in later life.
- 3.19 Pupils enjoy making a positive contribution to the school community through roles such as ambassadors and librarians. The active school council results in a very effective pupil voice which puts forward ideas for improvements in the school community, while the eco council considers ways in which the school can play its part in protecting the environment. Pupils are quick to stop and talk to

anyone who is feeling lonely or sad, and the messages they posted on the kindness tree showed their empathy and caring nature. They show a mature understanding of how they can help those less fortunate than themselves; for example by raising funds and providing practical support for a range of local, national and international charities. In a home clothes day for Children in Need, pupils spoke with understanding and compassion about how they would bring in money to give to children who may not have food to eat.

- 3.20 Pupils' excellent understanding of the cultural diversity that surrounds them at school and within their local communities is engendered by the strong school culture embodied by school leaders and governors. The school widens pupils' experience of diversity through, for example, Reception children learning to say good morning in a range of languages, and older pupils learn simple sign language. Pupils treat one another with kindness and consideration within a community that is calm, convivial and inclusive. All parents and most pupils felt that the school encourages an atmosphere of respect and tolerance. Pupils show a thorough understanding of the values that characterise good citizenship, which they acquire through a comprehensive PSHE programme. In discussions pupils showed an excellent understanding of what diversity, inclusion, and empathy mean in practice.
- 3.21 All pupils show a good understanding of healthy living and all parents and almost all pupils agreed in the questionnaire that the school encourages them to adopt a healthy lifestyle. Pupils are aided in making healthy eating choices by the ready availability of fresh fruit at mealtimes. The youngest children understand the importance of washing hands and eating a balanced diet. They discuss healthy lifestyles in PSHE and science lessons; for example, during the Year 3 topic 'Ourselves', pupils wrote advice for looking after their teeth. Pupils acquire skills to manage stress and maintain positive mental health and are aided in this by the school's mindfulness sessions. During remote learning, pupils enjoyed 'Wellbeing Wednesdays' with yoga lessons taught by video conferencing. Pupils appreciate the importance of physical fitness and enjoy both the formal sports programme and opportunities for recreation, using the excellent facilities provided. All pupils said that the school teaches them about safety, and they understand how to stay safe online. Almost all said they had someone they could talk to should they have any worries or concerns.

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 the proprietor, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr William Ibbetson-Price	Reporting inspector
Mrs Victoria Vaughan	Compliance team inspector (Senior leader, GSA school)
Mrs Julia Shenolikar	Team inspector (Deputy head, ISA school)
Mr Nigel Willetts	Team inspector (Former deputy, HMC school)