

Birches First School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	124077
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	380795
Inspection dates	28–29 February 2012
Lead inspector	Andrew Stafford

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	188
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Val Eastup
Headteacher	Judith Willcox
Date of previous school inspection	23 May 2007
School address	Birches Avenue Codsall Wolverhampton WV8 2JG
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Age group	3–9
Inspection date(s)	28–29 February 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

Andrew Stafford

Additional inspector

David Westall

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 17 lessons taught by eight teachers. Meetings were held with groups of pupils, staff and representatives of the governing body. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at: the school's development plan; documents and policies detailing how pupils are kept safe; the school's tracking data to see how well pupils are doing; and analyses of pupils' attainment. Inspectors scrutinised 130 completed questionnaires from parents and carers, 58 from pupils and 28 from staff.

Information about the school

Most pupils at this smaller than average primary school are from White British backgrounds. A small proportion are from minority ethnic backgrounds and very few are learning English as an additional language. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is below average, as is the proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals. The school has numerous awards, including National Healthy Schools, Eco-Schools Green Flag, Arts Mark Gold and Basic Skills Quality Mark and Dyslexia Friendly and Investors in People status. There have been three new members of the teaching staff since the previous inspection.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	1
Achievement of pupils	1
Quality of teaching	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	1

Key findings

- This is an outstanding school. Pupils and their parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive in their praise for the school. One parent, representing the views of many, wrote, 'I am exceptionally happy with Birches. When I leave my children, I know that they will be educated to the highest level by staff who genuinely care.'
- From starting points in line with age-related expectations on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage, all groups of pupils achieve exceptionally well and by the end of Year 4, pupils' attainment is well above national expectations in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Strong and trusting relationships underpin pupils' exemplary behaviour, which makes a strong contribution to their learning and to the smooth running of the safe school environment. Interesting and well-planned curricular experiences promote their learning and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development extremely well.
- Teaching is outstanding and ensures that pupils make rapid progress. All teachers have an excellent understanding of pupils' needs and challenge them to do as well as they can. Teachers concentrate on ensuring that every pupil, including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, makes at least good and often excellent progress.
- Led by a highly effective headteacher, the school is relentless in its drive to constantly improve the quality of teaching. Rigorous monitoring of pupils' progress enables the school to identify those pupils who are not on course to meet their challenging targets and provide support to accelerate their progress. Focused support has helped pupils to catch up and accelerate their progress in reading and writing but it was less successful in mathematics for a very small number of pupils in 2011. This was partly because the school does not always include measures against which to evaluate the success of support

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programmes.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the focused support, for the few pupils slipping behind in mathematics, includes measures against which its success can be measured.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Inspectors share the view expressed by parents and carers that pupils' achievement is outstanding. Children's attainment when they start school in the Nursery class is in line with expectations for their age. They make consistently rapid progress in all areas of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage to exceed expected levels by the end of the Reception year. Children make a strong start to reading. They regularly share books with each other and adults and talk about their reading knowledgeably. Group activities target particular skills well and effectively teach specific strategies for working out new words. The excellent focus on reading continues throughout the school and ensures attainment is well above expectations at age six years and by the end of Year 4. Achievement in all subjects is high. For the past three years, pupils' attainment in writing and mathematics, as well as in reading, has been well above that found in most schools by the end of Year 4. When pupils leave the school, their attainment is one year or more ahead of that expected for their age.

Learning and progress are excellent across the school because teaching is rarely less than good and much is outstanding. Evidence from lessons and pupils' work confirms that pupils in all year groups make rapid progress. In the excellent lessons observed, teachers always asked follow-up questions, that delved deeper into pupils' responses to ensure that progress was rapid. Pupils were encouraged to think about and give reasons why they had reached a particular conclusion. In lessons observed, pupils made rapid progress when they were identifying the suspect in a mystery story; explaining the conflict between characters in Roald Dahl's books; and talking about what was happening and what might happen next in a story during reading lessons. Teaching assistants are fully engaged in promoting pupils' learning throughout lessons through the use of incisive questioning. This ensures that disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are fully included and also excel.

Quality of teaching

Teaching is outstanding. There are many consistently strong features and teaching results in almost all pupils making rapid and sustained progress. Relationships are strong and trusting. Expectations are high and are made extremely clear so that

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pupils know exactly what they have to do to succeed. These features impact profoundly on pupils' attitudes and achievement. Parents and carers and pupils say that teaching is of high quality and their views are fully endorsed by inspection findings. Parents consider that they are well supported to help their children learn, through reading guidance, other homework and a wealth of other helpful information that teachers share with them. Teachers use imaginative methods to inspire pupils, and make their learning really exciting. For example, in a mathematics lesson in Year 4, pupils made exceptional progress in their ability to collect and handle data. Their smiling faces reflected how well the topic had captured their interest and how well the outstanding teaching was developing their capacity to direct their own learning. Discussions with adults about their learning help them to develop new skills rapidly and to think creatively and imaginatively. As a result, they develop a real love of learning early.

At every opportunity, teachers check that pupils are making enough progress and formally with the headteacher and assistant headteachers at least once every term. Any dips in progress are identified and pupils targeted through intensive support in reading or working in small groups in mathematics. Most pupils catch up and accelerate their progress as a result, including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. The school was quick to recognise that focused support in mathematics had not been fully effective for a small group of pupils in 2011. Leaders now check the effectiveness of support programmes closely, although the measures for success sometimes focus on actions taken rather than on planned improvements in pupils' achievement.

The school makes sure every pupil receives an exciting and meaningful curriculum and outstanding teaching. Excellent opportunities exist to practise skills in a varied range of subjects and topics, and the wonderful school grounds are used extensively to complement excellent teaching. The youngest children have excellent opportunities to learn inside and outdoors. Around 70% of pupils are learning to play a musical instrument and they demonstrate that they are accomplished musicians. Gifted and talented pupils have outstanding opportunities to extend their learning through projects, such as designing a car with children from other schools, and having philosophical discussions at school. Residential visits, arts productions, strong links with the church and inputs from specialist teachers of sport, modern foreign languages and music play a significant part in promoting pupils' spiritual, moral and social development. Pupils enjoy greatly the after-school clubs and the opportunities to play sport, especially against other local schools.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The school is highly successful in ensuring that pupils' well-being is at the heart of its work. This is especially so in the before- and after-school clubs, and the 'wraparound' care at lunchtime for nursery aged children. On these occasions, very happy children were observed learning and playing together purposefully with a good range of resources in a friendly and secure environment. Pupils are highly adept at managing their own behaviour in lessons and social situations. Visitors comment that pupils are

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consistently polite in things like saying 'good morning' and holding doors for them to go through first. All but a very few parents and carers who returned a questionnaire feel their children are safe in school and consider behaviour to be exemplary; inspectors share this view that it is typically like that and pupils agree. They have excellent awareness of how to keep themselves safe and healthy, for example, through the highly relevant work they did on drug and alcohol abuse following the visit of the Life Education Centre mobile classroom to the school. Pupils talk maturely about bullying in all its forms and know that it is not tolerated. The rare incidents of bullying, or any other concerns, are dealt with quickly and effectively by an adult. Pupils' consistently respectful attitudes and ability to forgive others and say sorry for their actions reflect their excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils are keen to come to school and their rate of attendance is above average and improving.

Leadership and management

The relentless drive for constant improvement in pupils' achievement and personal development permeates the whole school. The headteacher inspires everyone to embrace the school's vision. She has created a school team of staff, pupils, and members of the governing body who reflect deeply on their own contribution and performance. Staff are given the professional development, support and resources they need to succeed. As a result, everyone is involved in monitoring and evaluating the quality of what the school provides and in ensuring this is as good as it can be. The school's high commitment to promoting equality and tackling discrimination is shown through the determination and commitment of all staff to ensure that all pupils, including those with disabilities and special educational needs and the more able, achieve their full academic potential and attain a high level of personal development. The governing body plays an active role in the school's activities through effective working links with subjects and staff. Procedures for ensuring pupils' safety are robust and fully meet all current requirements. Parents and carers rightly express their utmost confidence in the leadership team.

The successful promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is woven throughout all aspects of the excellent curriculum. Pupils have opportunities to reflect deeply on issues that arise in assemblies and the classroom. Their participation in the Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Regeneration project means they are very well prepared for life in a multicultural, multi-faith society. Pupils' rights and responsibilities are well developed by the many visitors to school, who include the police, the fire service, health workers and faith visitors. Leaders have successfully involved pupils in environmental matters which has led them to supporting the installation of solar panels that supply electricity to the school.

The school has an outstanding capacity to improve. Leadership at all levels is focused on driving up achievement. Since the previous inspection, the school has improved pupils' academic achievement and strengthened further their personal development. Teachers' excellent use of assessment information ensures the right amount of challenge and support to accelerate pupils' progress. The more-able pupils in Years 3

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and 4 now receive a high level of challenge. This was identified as an area needing improvement in the previous inspection. Constant review of individual targets in reading, writing and mathematics and how to achieve them gives pupils an in-depth knowledge and understanding of their own learning. From the youngest to the oldest, pupils are able to point out precisely how much they have achieved during the year.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



1 March 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Birches First school, Wolverhampton, WV8 2JG

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited your school recently. Thank you to those of you who returned a questionnaire and took the time to tell us so much about your school.

Birches is an outstanding school. This means that everything in your school is at least good and most things are excellent. Your headteacher and teachers help you to achieve extremely well in your personal development and in your learning. Your behaviour is excellent. You are considerate and respectful of others' feelings and know when to tell a teacher or another adult if you have a concern. Bullying is very rare but you are confident that the school will sort things out quickly if it happens. Teachers make sure lessons are interesting and help you to make excellent progress. You have great opportunities to take part in a varied range of activities and to learn new things such as learning to play a musical instrument, taking part in sporting events and being a good eco-citizen. I wish I could sing as well as you all do. Your involvement with schools in this country and understanding of faiths around the world is excellent.

We have asked the school to assess your progress in mathematics more regularly, so that if your achievement slips you are given support very quickly. We have also asked the school to make sure that the extra support you receive helps you to make faster progress. You can help by continuing to check your work carefully and by telling your teachers if you need them to explain some of the work in more detail.

Thank you again for the warm welcome. We wish you and the school well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Stafford
Lead inspector

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