

Birchanger Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115127
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	357703
Inspection dates	12–13 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Sue Hall

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	88
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue Haggerwood-Bullen
Headteacher	Shirley Warbrick
Date of previous school inspection	10 March 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. They observed eight lessons taught by four teachers in the four classes in school. Meetings were held with the headteacher, groups of pupils, representatives of the governing body and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at documentation including: the tracking of pupils' progress, school improvement planning, the monitoring of teaching and learning, minutes of the governing body's meetings, documents relating to safeguarding and samples of pupils' recent work. They also scrutinised responses to the inspection questionnaires from 45 parents, 51 pupils and 13 staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- Are the monitoring and evaluation of the work of the school rigorous enough to identify the quality of education provided and further areas for improvement?
- Do all groups of pupils, particularly the higher attainers and those who find learning difficult, achieve well enough in their work?
- How well do teachers use assessment information to provide challenging activities to meet the needs of all groups?

Information about the school

This is a very small primary school close to the Essex / Hertfordshire border. Only 25% of pupils live within the catchment area. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. There is a very small number of pupils from ethnic minority groups and who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is a little above average with a range of specific learning difficulties including in communicating with others. The school has Healthy Schools status. There is a breakfast club which would normally have formed part of this inspection but as sessions are only held on Fridays it was not possible to evaluate this. There is also an on-site nursery, but this is not run by the governing body and is, therefore, inspected separately. The school has recently undergone some turbulence in staffing and a new headteacher and other staff were appointed earlier this year.

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: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

This is a school that provides a satisfactory quality of education following a period of decline since the previous inspection. Parents and staff note the many improvements since the appointment of the new headteacher. Their numerous comments are reflected in one parent's view that, 'The impact has been outstanding and her motivation, work ethic, sense of fun and ability to enthuse the children as well as the teaching staff is delightful to see.' Pupils like coming to school, they get on well together and their good behaviour has a positive impact on learning. Most have a good understanding of how to stay safe and to lead a healthy lifestyle.

Children make good progress in the Reception class and reach and often exceed national targets when they enter Year 1. In Key Stages 1 and 2, the pace of progress is less consistent and no more than satisfactory; so that when pupils leave the school standards are average. With small cohorts, it is difficult to make direct comparisons from year to year particularly when there are very small numbers of girls in some years or a large proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Most pupils achieve satisfactorily, but data and lesson observations confirm that not enough reach the higher levels in their work because they are not always fully challenged. While many pupils read quite well, their writing is more limited and some do not spell well or write at length and depth and with neat handwriting. In mathematics, pupils can calculate reasonably well but sometimes struggle to use what they know to solve problems.

The quality of teaching, learning and the curriculum are satisfactory. Staff have good relationships with pupils and offer a lot of praise for their efforts, which raises their self-esteem. There is a good range of extra activities that enrich pupils' learning. While planning for the mixed ages is done conscientiously, not enough use is made of the range of assessment information to set challenging tasks for groups of pupils of different abilities. At times, planning does not make clear enough exactly what the pupils are to learn and too often all pupils in the class complete very similar work which fails to challenge the higher attainers. The care, guidance and support of pupils are satisfactory with some strengths including the support of those with additional needs. Academic guidance is less effective because the marking of work and feedback to pupils is variable.

Leadership and management are satisfactory and the headteacher is working well to identify the school's strengths and to pinpoint where improvement is needed. Leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation and of provision for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities are also effective. Some other leadership roles are insufficiently developed to move learning further forward. In particular, the evaluation of planning, teaching and learning does not always identify what needs to be improved. The governing body is supportive and is developing its role through training. Its members recognise, rightly, the need to extend the programme of focused visits in order to hold the

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school more to account for the standards achieved. The capacity to improve is now satisfactory.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards and the achievement of pupils by:
 - ensuring that all groups and particularly those of higher ability are provided with consistently challenging work
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to develop the skills to write in depth and to use their mathematical knowledge to solve problems.
- Ensure greater consistency in teaching by:
 - making full use of the range of assessment information to set challenging activities that meets the needs of groups of pupils of different ability
 - checking that the planning of lessons makes clear exactly what the pupils are to learn.
- Monitor the work of the school more carefully by:
 - ensuring that the evaluation of planning, teaching and learning identifies what needs to be improved
 - extending the opportunities for all staff, and where appropriate members of the governing body, to monitor the effectiveness of provision in areas for which they hold responsibility.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with good social and speaking skills but with knowledge of letters and sounds, early mathematical understanding and other skills that are in line with expectations for their age. They are keen to learn and make good progress. For example, during the inspection children enjoyed a range of activities that developed their mathematical skills including matching a number of plastic mini-beasts with number cards. While progress in Years 1 to 6 is satisfactory, it is not as secure and some pupils do not achieve all they should in key areas. This, therefore, only makes a satisfactory contribution to their preparation for the future. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make at least satisfactory progress and this is often good in lessons where they receive effective one-to-one support. The very small number of pupils of minority ethnic heritage and who speak English as an additional language, have good bi-lingual skills and make the same progress as their classmates. Pupils of all abilities make at least satisfactory progress in reading, but do not do as well in writing. This is reflected in samples of recent work produced by older pupils. This is often untidily presented and several, including those of higher ability, do not write in sufficient detail, at length or with grammatical accuracy. Lesson observations show that pupils are not always able to use what they already know to solve mathematical problems for instance when investigating lines of symmetry.

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Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe including in very active play on the school field. They know that exercising and eating sensibly helps them to lead a healthy lifestyle. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. This is reflected in pupils' enjoyment of singing together in harvest preparations and their interest in learning to play a range of musical instruments and in other cultural activities. Pupils enjoy taking on responsibilities in and around the school but these are not extensive and something the school has plans, rightly, to develop further including in environmental work. Attendance is broadly average: the school monitors this carefully working with any family where children have persistent absence.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

A strength of the teaching and the curriculum is the supportive way that staff work with the pupils. The best teaching is seen in the Early Years Foundation Stage where staff plan linked activities that move learning forward well. Other staff plan for a two-year age and ability range but this is not always clear enough in identifying exactly what the pupils are to learn and in the specific levels of challenge for those of different abilities. While staff have assessment information available in several different formats that shows individual and cohort progress, information about pupils' prior attainment is not used well enough to set work that is appropriately challenging. Occasionally, some staff do not have an

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accurate understanding of what makes for effective teaching and learning and are confident the pupils are making more progress than they are.

Pastoral care is good because teachers and support staff know the pupils well. The provision for those with additional needs is particularly effective and those with a statement of special educational needs have individual programmes and close support that meets their needs well. The marking of pupils' work is very variable. At times, this is extensive and not easily understood by pupils, while at other times, comments fail to identify what needs to be improved. Occasionally, support staff spend too much time rubbing out the work of some pupils rather than helping them to think more about what they are meant to be doing.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	3

How effective are leadership and management?

With the appointment of the new headteacher, there have been many changes and there is a clear drive for further improvements. Staff responses to the inspection questionnaire are very largely positive, summarised by one who notes 'New headteacher from January 2010 and much has been achieved in this time'. A start has been made in monitoring and rigorously evaluating the quality of planning, teaching and learning. The headteacher accurately identifies the current strengths and areas for improvement, although there is recognition that this rarely involves other members of staff and many of the recent changes are not fully embedded or used consistently. The range of information is now used effectively to inform self-evaluation procedures and school improvement planning. The governing body fulfils the statutory requirements placed upon it and has recently grown in awareness of the quality of education provided. Its members correctly identified the need to involve themselves more in focused visits so that they are aware of what happens in the classroom and are in a stronger position to hold the school to account for what is provided.

Links with parents are good and many are actively involved in supporting the day-to-day life of the school. Links with other organisations are satisfactory with some good elements in working with agencies to support pupils with additional needs, although curriculum links with other schools are not fully utilised. The school promotes equality of opportunity satisfactorily but sometimes has failed to recognise the needs of higher attaining pupils well enough. There are many beneficial links with local groups and organisations including the church, although links on a wider and global basis are less well developed meaning that the promotion of community cohesion is satisfactory. Safeguarding procedures are

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satisfactory but the monitoring and evaluation of current practices are not yet rigorous enough, including in identifying minor omissions in the recording of information.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage as fairly confident individuals who are keen to do what their older siblings and friends do. There is a good programme of induction that takes account of family preferences so, for instance, some children attend on a part-time basis until their parents are happy that they can cope with full days in school. Children enjoy their time in the Reception class and make good progress in all areas of their early development because teaching, learning and the curriculum are good. With relatively small groups, the children get a lot of individual help and attention and some make rapid gains in what they know, understand and can do. This was seen when several children produced collages of different numbers by collecting and sticking items onto a sheet largely unaided and also in their knowledge of letters and sounds. Occasionally, staff could do even more to model and encourage the children to use key words in their discussions in order to widen their vocabulary and early writing skills even further. Children enjoy using the outdoor area which, whilst a little unkempt, is used well to support learning in all areas.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents or carers who responded to the inspection was about average. Most are generally pleased with the quality of education and care provided for their children. Many comment on the significant impact made by the new headteacher including saying that, 'The new headteacher has had a very positive effect throughout the school.' Another parent notes, 'I think the school is led by a strong, caring, professional headteacher who cares for both the results and the well-being of the pupils.' Several parents feel they would like more information regarding what progress their children are making and how to help them at home. A few have questions about whether the school meets the needs of the higher attaining children well enough. Some parents believe the older pupils are not given sufficient homework, which they feel does not help them prepare well for the future. Inspectors endorse the comments made by parents and note that the school could do a little more to inform and involve them in their children's learning.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Birchanger Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 45 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 88 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	28	62	17	38	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	27	60	18	40	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	20	44	19	42	6	13	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	19	42	21	47	2	4	2	4
The teaching is good at this school	24	53	20	44	1	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	21	47	18	40	5	11	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	22	49	19	42	1	2	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	15	33	23	51	3	7	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	23	51	19	42	3	7	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	19	42	22	49	2	4	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	20	44	21	47	2	4	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	35	78	10	22	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	33	73	11	24	1	2	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

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.



14 October 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Birchanger Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, Bishop's Stortford, CM23 5QL

Thank you very much for making the inspectors welcome when we visited your

- school recently. My colleague and I really enjoyed meeting you, including the group I talked to who were particularly good at explaining what you all do. I was very impressed with the sensible opinions and ideas of some of you older pupils. I thought what nice young people you are. I also liked meeting you in lessons, at lunchtimes and when I attended assembly and singing practice. I particularly enjoyed seeing the Reception children identifying different mini-beast models and listening to the ukulele club. Thank you also for the questionnaires that you filled in for the inspection. These are some of our findings from the visit.

Your school is providing you with a satisfactory quality of education. There have been a lot of changes this year and things are improving. I was impressed by your good behaviour and this is helping your learning. I was pleased to see you know how to keep safe and enjoy lots of activities outdoors.

To improve your school further, we have asked the headteacher and staff to:

- help you all make more progress, particularly those who find learning easy by showing you how to improve your writing and solve mathematical problems
- make sure that teachers use the information they have about the progress you make to ensure work is just a bit harder for most of you
- improve the way staff and sometimes the governing body (who are the people who help to run the school) check what is working well and what else needs to improve.

To help your school, you might all try a little bit harder to make your work even better, for instance, by making sure your writing is neatly presented.

Yours sincerely

Sue Hall

Lead inspector

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