

Birchfield Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110958
Local Authority	Halton
Inspection number	356838
Inspection dates	8–9 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Frank Carruthers

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

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3–4
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	119
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Green
Headteacher	Mrs Sue Duxbury
Date of previous school inspection	12 May 2008
School address	Victoria Avenue Widnes Cheshire WA8 7TH
Telephone number	0151 424 4681
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Age group	3–4
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Twelve lessons or parts of lessons were observed involving the two teachers and all teaching assistants. Meetings were held with senior staff and the Chair and one other member of the Governing Body. Inspectors spoke to parents and carers, observed the school's work, and looked at children's records and profiles, school assessments, planning and school policies, including those concerning the safeguarding of children. Eighty-eight questionnaires were returned by parents or carers, which were read and analysed. Staff also completed a questionnaire.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How well all children are achieving, including those with additional needs and the very few who are learning English as an additional language.
- Whether the high quality of provision has been maintained since the time of the last inspection.
- How effective leadership and management at all levels are.
- How robust all aspects of safeguarding are.

Information about the school

Birchfield is larger than most nursery schools. Most children spend three terms at the school prior to moving on to local primary schools. They attend either morning or afternoon sessions. Almost all children are White British. A small proportion has special educational needs and/or disabilities, which are mainly speech and language delay, social and emotional needs or medical needs. A few children have English as an additional language. The school has gained the I CAN certification in communication skills, the Financial Management in Schools award, the Healthy Schools status and the Gold Tooth Care award.

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?**1****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****1**

Main findings

The school continues to provide an outstanding education for its children. It has maintained, and in some aspects, improved the high quality of teaching, learning and the curriculum that was found at the last inspection. Leadership, management and governance are excellent in all aspects. They are rooted in outstanding teamwork and a firm commitment to doing the very best for all children.

Children love coming to school and make excellent progress in all areas of learning. They settle in quickly and make great strides in their personal, social and emotional development. Of particular note to any visitor to school is how busy and interested the children are in all that they do. They concentrate extremely well, getting the most out of each activity before moving on to the next. They play very happily together; take turns well and share things. They are kind to one another and become confident and independent learners. Because of the work of very well trained teaching assistants, children with additional needs, such as delay in their speech and language development, make excellent progress. Children's behaviour is excellent, and their skills of speaking and listening develop at a fast rate. They are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage of their schooling.

Staff have created an outstanding environment for learning which results in excellent achievement for children. Classrooms are interestingly laid out to match the six areas of learning appropriate for the age group. The outdoor area is exceptional for the range and quality of opportunities it provides. Currently, staff cannot take full advantage of the outdoor provision when the weather is poor, although the school has good plans in hand to provide cover. The quality of teaching by all staff is excellent. Planning the programme of learning for children matches their needs extremely well. There is an excellent balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities. Relationships with the children are warm and supportive and all aspects of care, guidance and support are of high quality and, as a consequence, children feel extremely safe.

The headteacher and the assistant headteacher share their driving ambition and commitment to continuous improvement with all staff and those connected to the school. They make excellent use of partnerships with others to enrich the provision for children. The contribution of the governing body is excellent. All involved in school have an excellent awareness of how the school is performing and make extremely effective use of this information to do the best for all children, whatever their particular circumstances. As a result of these strengths, the school has excellent capacity to sustain this high level of performance, and provides excellent value for money.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Pursue the plans to extend the children's opportunities outside classrooms by providing a covered area.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of children

1

Most children start school with levels of attainment that are typical of children who have just turned three years old. From the moment children arrive, they are ready to learn and they eagerly start on the day's activities. All, including those with special education needs and/or disabilities and those with English as an additional language greatly enjoy school and make excellent progress. After three terms, most children have surpassed expectations and many are well on the way to achieving the early learning goals in each area of learning. Their achievement is excellent.

Older children provide excellent role models for younger ones as they start school, not only in how they behave but in how they hold conversations and respond to questions in class. Children frequently reply in complete sentences. For example, one child described tying a shoelace as 'you have to pull it round and inside out'. Boys' language and early literacy skills were identified as lagging behind expected progress. Through a concerted focus on providing activities that involve the children in talking together, staff have narrowed this attainment gap between boys and girls. Boys are much more likely now to use pencils and pens to draw and write lists and plans linked to what they are making or constructing. Through songs and action rhymes the children quickly gain a very good understanding of numbers and counting forward and back.

Children become independent in dressing themselves for outdoor play, washing hands and using aprons. They gain an excellent awareness of personal hygiene before they eat snacks or after they go to the toilet. Staff help them to understand what happens to their bodies when they take exercise. Their physical development is excellent. They become increasingly safe and skilful using the climbing frames, ladders, steps and tunnels. They look after resources very well, readily tidying up when asked. They proudly show parents and carers and visitors what they have done each day.

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

These are the grades for children's outcomes

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

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?

The outstanding provision is the result of high quality staff who put into practice skills they have learnt from one another and excellent training opportunities they have had. Teaching assistants have developed specific skills that complement the work of the school exceptionally well, focusing, for example, on aspects such as speech and language delay or the emotional development of the children.

Classrooms are furnished and equipped to a high standard to cover specific areas of learning. Staff and children move between rooms throughout the week and cover each area in depth. Children are grouped together with key adults so that each one gets to know the children in their group exceptionally well and tracks their progress meticulously. Staff have high expectations of children. In registration groups, for example, conversations are carried on in French. There is an excellent balance between whole class sessions, 'family group' work and individual and small group sessions with teaching assistants and very skilled volunteers. In these sessions the children are helped to be confident, develop skills of fine control with their hands and improve their understanding of letters and sounds. Outdoors, children have the space to enjoy a full range of exciting activities, using large wheeled toys, sand and water play, dressing up, building and constructing, playing in several houses and dens, as well as digging and planting in the vegetable area. This has been an area of significant development in recent years and is an outstanding facility.

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Plans to cover areas outside classrooms to improve the quality of provision in poor weather are in hand.

All aspects of care, guidance and support are excellent. The staff do a great deal to support parents and carers, especially those who have children with additional needs. Daily contact with parents and carers means the school can provide excellent support during periods of family stress. Extremely thorough assessments of each child's needs ensure that support for both their welfare and their learning is carefully targeted. In addition there are comprehensive arrangements for the smooth transition of children to each of the local schools at the end of the summer term.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets children's needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The shared vision of all staff and governors drives school improvement forward at a very good pace. Governors bring their many skills to oversee strategic planning exceptionally well. They deliberate with and challenge the senior leadership team to ensure all decisions are carefully reached, monitored and costed. At the centre of decision-making is the quality of provision so that all children can blossom.

The school promotes equality of opportunity by offering places to children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and catering for them extremely well. Regular risk assessments and thorough child protection measures, including the safe recruitment of staff, mean safeguarding procedures are outstanding. Governors use their considerable business and industrial experience to make an excellent contribution in these matters.

The school promotes community cohesion exceptionally well through excellent links with parents and carers, providing opportunities for them to improve their own skills and their understanding of how children develop. Partnerships with other services, such as those providing speech therapy, are very effective in helping children to overcome barriers to their learning. The school invites into school a wide range of people from the community such as the fire and police services, local dance and drama groups and parents and carers from minority cultures. It has developed good links with schools in China, France and Ghana to promote the children's awareness of other cultures.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

In terms of the percentage of questionnaires returned, the response was very high compared to most inspections of similar schools. Almost all parents and carers who responded expressed their full support for the work of the school. Their response to almost all the questions was unanimously positive. Just under half of respondents included appreciative comments about the school. They greatly value the welcoming, family atmosphere the staff generate. A comment typical of those in many questionnaires was 'I cannot speak highly enough of Birchfield. This is a wonderful environment, under the excellent leadership of the headteacher and her fabulous team. Both of my children have flourished.' Parents and carers appreciate how the school helps their children to achieve very well and report how much their children enjoy school. They consider teaching to be excellent and their children are extremely well looked after. They feel they are kept well informed about school and about how their children are doing. Inspectors endorse these positive opinions and consider they are a reflection of the highly successful partnerships the school has with parents and carers. A few parents and carers report they would like more information about how well their child is doing. However, the school has an open door policy of informing parents and carers about their children's development and sends home a profile of each child during the second term after they have started. The profile is due to be sent home this month and was therefore preceded by the inspection questionnaire.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Birchfield Nursery 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 88 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 119 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	74	84	14	16	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	83	94	5	6	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	57	65	25	28	4	5	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	68	77	18	20	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	78	89	9	10	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	77	88	11	13	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	72	82	16	18	0	0	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)	64	73	18	20	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	71	81	17	19	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	64	73	18	20	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	66	75	18	20	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	79	90	8	9	1	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	80	91	8	9	0	0	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 children's needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its children well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its children.
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 children. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a child in their learning and development.
Attainment:	in other phases of school, for example primary schools, attainment is the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons. However, there is no national average for three- and four-year-olds. Therefore, in inspections of nursery schools, inspectors take account of expectations in the age-related bands of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
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 children 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 children. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets children's needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which children are learning in nursery sessions and over longer periods of time.

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.



10 February 2011

Dear Children,

Inspection of Birchfield Nursery School, Widnes, WA8 7TH

I really enjoyed visiting you all at your school. It was marvellous seeing how much you enjoy everything you do. You were so busy!

When you were playing outdoors, I was astonished at how much there was for you to do. I would have liked to have a go with the cement mixers but you were all shovelling and mixing the sand so well I did not want to disturb you.

Your parents and carers think your school is fantastic and I agree. It is outstanding. The grown-ups look after you all so well and give you so many things to do that I am not surprised you all love it.

I enjoyed working in the new Garden House which you will all soon be using. The grown-ups also want to put a roof outside the classrooms so you can play there even more happily when it is raining. That's a good idea I think they should do.

It is really great that you are all learning so well and I hope you carry on enjoying this school and the next one you go to.

Yours sincerely

Frank Carruthers

Lead inspector

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