

Birchwood Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125621
Local Authority	Warwickshire
Inspection number	359913
Inspection dates	4–5 July 2011
Reporting inspector	David Speakman

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	401
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fleur Fernando
Headteacher	Edward May
Date of previous school inspection	27 November 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. Inspectors saw 20 lessons or parts of lessons taught by 16 teachers. Meetings were held with senior leaders, representatives of the governing body and groups of pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, including monitoring, evaluation and assessment records, policy documents, the school improvement plan, teachers' planning and samples of pupils' work. A wide range of documents and records was scrutinised in relation to the safeguarding of pupils. Inspectors took into account the results of questionnaires returned by 185 parents and carers, 100 pupils and 49 members of staff.

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

- Is the improvement in progress, as seen in the school's assessment data, similar for all groups of pupils?
- How much experience do pupils have of the diverse range of cultures and backgrounds in the United Kingdom and globally?
- What impact is curriculum change having on standards and progress, especially writing?
- How much impact has new leadership had on school improvement?

Information about the school

This is a larger-than-average, two-form entry primary school. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. There are very few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds or who are at the early stages of learning English. The percentage of pupils identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities is similar to other schools and the proportion with a statement of special needs is broadly average. A new headteacher was appointed from September 2010 and the deputy headteacher was appointed in 2009. There have also been a number of changes in membership of the governing body and of the senior leadership team. The school has been awarded Healthy School status, an Eco-Flag (Green Flag), International School Award, Warwickshire International Primary School of the Year Award, and the Activemark recognising the school's provision for sports.

The school is on the same site as Polesworth Children's Centre, which was subject to a separate but aligned inspection. Before- and after-school care is provided by Birchwood Pre-School, which is managed independently of the school's governing body. This provision is subject to a parallel inspection by Ofsted.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Birchwood Primary is a good school. Under new leadership, the school has experienced a rapid pace of improvement. In the short time since joining the school, the headteacher has demonstrated outstanding leadership in establishing an effective strategic direction. He is very ably supported by the deputy headteacher and senior leadership team, who have put into place a number of effective initiatives that have led to significant improvement in key areas of provision and outcomes. Because of the scale and pace of improved provision and outcomes, the school is judged to have a good capacity to sustain further improvement. The governing body's effectiveness is satisfactory. It has undergone significant change with a new chair and a reduction in the number of governors through re-constitution. Governors have audited their skills and completed a self-evaluation of their performance. However, the level of challenge the governing body provides to the school's leaders and managers varies.

Monitoring and evaluation of teachers' classroom performance has successfully raised the quality of teaching, which is now good overall. Senior leaders observe lessons on a regular basis. Feedback and improvement targets are given to teachers and followed through. Areas for whole school development are identified, which support the school's accurate self-evaluation. Any inadequate teaching has been eradicated and most teaching is now good or better. Although the overall quality of teaching has improved, there is still some variation. In lessons that are satisfactory, teaching does not sufficiently extend opportunities for pupils to work independently.

Robust procedures for monitoring pupil's progress give an accurate picture of the progress made in each term in each year group. Staff use this information to good effect to identify where extra support is needed to accelerate progress. Consequently, learning and progress are now good in each phase and for all groups of pupils.

Attainment in English at the end of Year 6 has been broadly average since 2006 but in mathematics it has been lower. During this school year, school improvement has had a strong focus on raising the levels of pupils' literacy skills. Current assessment data show improved standards in English. Attainment in reading and writing are both above average. In mathematics, improvement has not been as rapid, with standards being broadly average. This year, 47% of pupils achieved the higher level 5 in reading, 33% in writing yet only 19% reached this level in mathematics. Inspection evidence shows pupils lack confidence in using mental mathematics and some pupils do not approach problem solving in a logical and structured way.

Pupils thoroughly enjoy school. They find work interesting, especially the changes brought about by the introduction of a thematic approach to learning currently being trialled in the school. Curriculum change this year has also been an important factor in improved writing, where pupils have a wide range of opportunities to further develop their writing skills in

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other subjects. Pupils feel safe in school. This is supported by the good safeguarding procedures and care, guidance and support shown by the school. Aspects of safeguarding are outstanding, particularly those in relation to child protection. Behaviour is good and makes a significant contribution to the quality of learning and the extent to which pupils enjoy school. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education and older ones are confident about their move to secondary school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards in mathematics by:
 - increasing the proportion of pupils working at, and hence gaining the higher level 5, to at least match the national average
 - raising pupils' confidence in mental mathematics
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to develop problem-solving strategies and consolidate their numeracy skills.
- Improve the quality of teaching to become consistently good or better in all classes by:
 - sharing the outstanding practice seen in some classes with all teachers to provide a baseline for quality
 - extending opportunities for pupils to work both independently and in groups to develop further their learning skills.
- Increase the level of challenge provided by the governing body in holding the school to account for its performance through deepening their knowledge and understanding in improvement priority areas.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Children's skill levels on entry to the Reception Year are below those typical for children of this age. Standards at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 are in line with the national average. Learning and progress are good at each key stage. As this is a recent improvement, the school has not yet built up a record of sustained above average standards, so attainment over time is average. Because learning and progress are good and attainment average, achievement is good. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make similar progress to other pupils due to the focused support which matches their particular needs well. Teaching assistants are prepared well to support pupils who find learning more challenging and in some cases, high-level input keeps pupils with low attention spans on task. They experience a variety of interesting tasks and praise when they do well. This has the effect of enabling the teacher to focus on other groups, ensuring good levels of challenge for all pupils, including those capable of higher attainment for example.

Pupils fully engage in learning when lessons are interesting and stimulate their curiosity. In an outstanding Year 5 English lesson, pupils enthusiastically discussed, in a mature and sensible way, the personal qualities of heroes in Greek mythology. They used this very good understanding of personal strength to question 'hot-seated' pupils in role and to make informed decisions. Pupils thoroughly enjoyed this activity. Year 3 pupils were

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similarly engaged when working out the value of stolen goods following a burglary. Not only did this highly challenging activity help develop pupils' numeracy skills, but they were very keen to disapprove of the burglar's actions and keen to help the police. Behaviour in both of these lessons was excellent because pupils were so involved in the activities. When they are less challenged or not as involved, behaviour is satisfactory. Behaviour is good at other times in the school day around school and at break times and good overall. Pupils enjoy school and their attendance and punctuality are good. All pupils spoken to feel safe in school. Both pupils' and parents' and carers' questionnaires show a very positive response to this question. Pupils have a good understanding of safe and unsafe situations. They show a good knowledge and understanding of how to maintain a healthy lifestyle. They understand a range of health issues and uptake of sporting activity is high. The school has the Sports Active Mark and National Healthy School status to acknowledge outcomes in this area.

Pupils make a good contribution to school life. They show initiative when undertaking the wide and varied responsibilities, such as working on the school council, eco-committee or being play leaders. They have good levels of community involvement and show their community spirit in the 'anti-dog-mess' posters they designed and in their support of local charities and those further afield. This is typical of the strength in pupils' moral and social development. Pupils' spiritual awareness in relation to appreciating others' beliefs is not so well-developed.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
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	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
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

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How effective is the provision?

Teachers explain clearly the purpose of lessons so pupils know what is expected of them. The marking of pupils' work is generally good, but does not always provide developmental comments to help them improve. Teachers have secure knowledge of pupils' prior attainment and use this effectively to match work well to their learning needs. Teachers use questioning skills well for assessment, to extend pupils' reasoning skills and deepen their understanding. Teaching assistants work well with individuals and groups to give them the confidence to achieve. Some teachers plan good opportunities for peer and self-assessment so that pupils learn from their own and others' work. Occasionally, in plenary sessions at the end of lessons, teachers talk too much, reducing the opportunity for pupils to be involved in reviewing their progress.

The curriculum provides a good range of learning experiences for all pupils. Literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology are linked effectively to other subjects so there is a range of different opportunities to develop core skills. This is currently being developed further. The curriculum is inclusive and arrangements are made to ensure all pupils have equality of opportunity to learn and make progress. This is achieved through interventions and extra support for those in danger of falling behind, and through links with other providers to extend the more able. The curriculum is enriched well to provide a wide variety of learning experiences.

Parents and carers are extremely positive about the good care, guidance and support provided. Transition arrangements are effective, including when joining the school and when moving onto the secondary school. The school has striking examples of how support has made a significant difference to behaviour, confidence and achievement for some pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. Pupils speak very highly about how attending the social skills group has improved their behaviour.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

In a short time, the headteacher has been effective in establishing a culture in which staff are proud to be associated with the school and are keen to improve their own performance to benefit pupils. The deputy headteacher and senior leadership team have been effective in working with the headteacher in an open and frank way. Their contribution to school improvement, monitoring and evaluating classroom performance and supporting staff, is significant. They have helped to implement very effective tracking systems to monitor individual, class and year group progress. Senior leaders hold teachers

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and teaching assistants accountable for the progress of pupils through frequent pupil progress reviews. The quality of teaching is regularly monitored, which helps identify professional development needs to equip staff with the skills and knowledge to raise their classroom performance. The work of the governing body is satisfactory, and improving following re-organisation. New governors are growing in confidence and knowledge as they develop their roles, and beginning to challenge leaders on aspects of school improvement.

The school has an inclusive ethos and all pupils are encouraged to be involved. The school uses a range of strategies and interventions to support identified pupils and all groups achieve equally well. There is strong evidence to show that the progress of all groups of pupils has undergone similar rates of improvement this year. All pupils get on well and staff deal effectively with any rare instances of discrimination if they occur. Safeguarding is good. All adults who have unsupervised contact with pupils are fully checked for suitability. Child protection is exceptionally strong and highly effective. The governing body ensures the health and safety of the site, and that risk assessments of school activities are undertaken. These are robust but do not always include parents' and carers' and pupils' views, where relevant, although recent ones for activities in the Early Years Foundation Stage do. Members of the governing body are fully trained in aspects relating to safeguarding and implement and monitor policies carefully.

The school has a good understanding of its socio-economic, religious and ethnic context through carrying out an audit. It is implementing a series of actions to respond to this. These include increasing pupils' experience of a more diverse ethnic community through establishing strong links with other schools locally and overseas.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

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Early Years Foundation Stage

Children enjoy their learning and achieve well in relation to their starting points. They make particularly good progress in developing their communication, language and literacy skills, due to the whole-school focus in developing this area. Some children still find calculating a challenge, but others are very confident in adding mentally, such as working out very quickly the cost of a small bunch of flowers if each one is 10p. Children's personal development is good. They quickly develop an understanding of what school is all about. They take on responsibility for their own learning, through making choices when to complete three 'star activities' planned each week. Individual children are responsible for recording when they have completed each task. This helps them develop independence. Children get on well with each other and with adults. They behave well and work equally well independently or in collaboration with other children. They understand how to stay safe. They automatically put on protective hats when working in the outdoor area and contributed to risk assessments for the recent trip to Birmingham airport. Children are confident communicators and are proud of what they achieve, enthusiastically sharing work with adults.

The quality of provision is good because planning is of a good standard. It takes into account both children's and parents' and carers' ideas to ensure that every child is offered an enjoyable and challenging learning experience. The current 'Dutch' theme is successfully translated into learning through purposeful play and exploration, both indoors and outside. This includes very effective water-play activities, where children explore floating and sinking using a variety of materials. This activity formed a highly effective base for future scientific exploration. Other activities helped children develop early ideas on capacity. Occasionally, the balance between adult-led and child-initiated learning is weighted too much towards teacher input. However, teaching is good overall, with some outstanding practice being observed during the inspection. Activities are well-planned and based upon thorough assessment and observation.

The Early Years Foundation Stage leader and headteacher are fully focused on giving children a quality start to their education. She has an exceptional understanding of high quality Early Years Foundation Stage practice and is working towards achieving this quality. They have been rigorous in their self-evaluation and determined in their commitment to improvement. Many positive changes have taken place this school year, including parental engagement and communication, but most importantly, the raised profile of the Early Years Foundation Stage within the whole school. Good links are developing with the children's centre and with pre-school to increase support for the Reception children and their families.

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	2

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Stage	
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Views of parents and carers

Almost a half of parents and carers sent in questionnaires and this response is greater than that usually found. Parents and carers have positive views of the school and there was strong agreement with all statements in the questionnaire. Written comments and questionnaires outlined a small number of concerns, particularly relating to levels of staff absence in some classes and the change in leadership style. Inspectors looked carefully at these issues. Staff absence has had some impact on learning in some classes, but the headteacher and governors have resolved these issues for the next academic year. The leadership style of the headteacher has been very effective and has led to significant and rapid improvement.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Birchwood 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 185 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 401 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	110	59	67	36	5	3	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	128	69	57	31	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	94	51	85	46	6	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	81	44	90	49	8	4	3	2
The teaching is good at this school	95	51	83	45	4	2	2	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	94	51	80	43	8	4	2	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	108	58	73	39	3	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)	95	51	82	44	4	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	88	48	88	48	1	1	4	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	98	53	77	42	5	3	2	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	80	43	91	49	3	2	3	2
The school is led and managed effectively	96	52	77	42	3	2	4	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	106	57	71	38	2	1	2	1

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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 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 2010/11 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 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.



6 July 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Birchwood Primary School, Tamworth, B78 1QU

Thank you for the very warm welcome you showed us when we inspected your school. We enjoyed meeting and talking to you in lessons and in the group discussions. Your views were really helpful and it was clear that you are proud of your school. Birchwood has improved greatly this year and is now a good school.

You all make good progress and the standards in your school work by Year 6 are improving all the time. However, improvement in mathematics is not as rapid as that in English. Those of you who receive extra support because you find learning more difficult make good progress as well. We noticed you have a sensible and mature approach to school life, that you enjoy school a great deal and behave well. Adults make sure that the school is a safe and pleasant place for you to come to each day.

The school is led and managed well and the headteacher and his staff are always looking for ways to improve it even more. To help with further improvement, we have asked your teachers to help you gain more confidence in using mental mathematics and in solving problems so standards in mathematics match those in English. We have also asked the headteacher to make sure that all teaching is at least good and teachers give you challenging tasks to develop your independent learning skills.

Well done in helping your teachers improve your school as much you all have done this last year. We are confident that you will do all you can to help to maintain this pace of improvement in the future.

Yours sincerely

David Speakman

Lead inspector

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