

# Birchwood Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	124681
<b>Local Authority</b>	Suffolk
<b>Inspection number</b>	380956
<b>Inspection dates</b>	19–20 September 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Graham Preston

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	203
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Joanna Jones
<b>Headteacher</b>	Stephen Cloke
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	23 September 2008
<b>School address</b>	Valiant Road Martlesham Heath Ipswich IP5 3SP
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<b>Age group</b>	4-11
<b>Inspection date(s)</b>	19–20 September 2011
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors observed 17 lessons taught by eight teachers. Meetings were held with members of the governing body, groups of pupils and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at documentation, including that relating to safeguarding practices, the school's self-evaluation and development planning. Also, they analysed 63 questionnaires from parents and carers and 115 pupils' questionnaires.

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

- Is the school sustaining its improved standards and pupil progress throughout the different years, especially in Year 5?
- What are the key strengths of teaching and assessment that enable the school to say that teaching and learning support are consistently good or better?
- How effective is Early Years Foundation Stage provision in ensuring that all make sufficiently good progress, given that some children enter the school with above-average skills and knowledge for their age?
- How effective are the school's leaders and the recently reformulated governing body in monitoring and evaluating provision rigorously and driving further improvements?

## Information about the school

This is an average-sized primary school that serves Martlesham Heath near Ipswich. The school roll has risen steadily in recent years and now a majority of its pupils come from outside the catchment area. Most pupils are White British, with a growing proportion of pupils from other backgrounds. The percentage of pupils learning English as an additional language is broadly average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. The proportion of pupils joining or leaving the school other than at the usual times is higher than in other schools. The school has undergone considerable development as part of its commitment to ecology, with the installation of solar heating and a soon-to-be-installed ground source heat pump. Together with its related curriculum development, that has enabled the school to win the Suffolk Greenest County Award, gain the Green Flag as an Eco-school, be recognised as a Forest School, and gain Activemark and Healthy Schools status.

**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 is a good school with a distinctive vision for learning that enriches and empowers its pupils considerably. The school is led well by an enthusiastic and dedicated headteacher, supported by a talented and energetic staff; their hard work and commitment are much appreciated by parents and carers. The reformulated and very active governing body works closely with the school on further improvement.

In most years, pupils make good progress so that, by Year 6, they reach above-average standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Strategies introduced in the last two years to improve standards in English and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2 are proving effective and the school's rigorous tracking shows that most pupils in other years make good progress also. That includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, whose outcomes compare favourably with similar pupils nationally, and a number of others who join the school other than at the usual time. Those pupils have often underachieved previously and retrieve considerable lost ground after coming to the school.

Apart from the gains in literacy and numeracy, pupils develop considerably in many other ways. That is reflected in their enthusiasm, readiness to participate actively, and growing awareness of wider social, cultural and ecological issues. Although coming from an increasingly wider geographical area, pupils attend very regularly and the majority cycle or walk to school. Pupils feel safe and behave well in a school where there is respect for others and older pupils look after the youngest as 'guardian angels'. What is most distinctive about the school is the wide range of opportunities and experiences for all pupils to have active lifestyles and be responsible and involved in through the Eco-council, school council, Forest School activities, musical events, sports, conferences, partner schools in Suffolk, and visits and links with France and the West Indies. Through all those activities, pupils demonstrate healthy lifestyles and make a highly significant contribution to the school and wider community.

All of that is possible because of the high level of commitment of staff, with every member running one or more of the large number of extra-curricular activities and working together to provide an imaginative and exciting curriculum. Teaching is consistently good and, on occasions, outstanding. Teachers are lively and skilled classroom practitioners who get on well with their classes and make learning interesting. Generally, pupils make good progress in their learning, though occasionally whole-class presentations are either too hard or too easy for some

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groups of pupils. Similarly, some of the individual learning activities are not always matched well to pupils' different abilities and needs. There is much good practice in marking, with considerable positive and helpful comments. In Year 6, such comments help pupils see how they can reach their National Curriculum target levels. However, the link between marking and improving National Curriculum levels is less clear to pupils in other years. Care, guidance and support are strong in what is an inclusive and supportive school where pupils with particular needs benefit from careful monitoring and good additional support.

The headteacher and deputy headteacher work well together to provide a good level of professional development to subject leaders and support for staff, all of whom take an active part in school improvement. That results in high morale and a readiness by all to reflect and improve on current practice. Careful tracking of pupils' progress ensures rigorous self-evaluation. The school has used it effectively to direct additional learning support and improve the accuracy and consistency of assessment. That is especially so at the transition points between Early Years Foundation Stage and Year 1 and Year 2 to Year 3. The relatively new governing body is involved heavily in the life of the school with a governor attached to and working closely with each subject leader. The governing body has carefully reviewed and improved school policies and is working with the senior leadership to raise standards further. The school has been particularly successful in developing a distinctive curriculum and a considerably enhanced physical environment that contributes to the overall development of each pupil. A current focus on further improving literacy and numeracy is also proving effective. Those strengths, together with a strong and cohesive leadership and management, enable the school to demonstrate a good capacity for sustained improvement.

**What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Ensure teaching is consistently good or better by:
  - having an appropriate balance of teacher-led, individual and group-centred learning activities within each lesson
  - providing sufficiently challenging learning opportunities for all pupils.
- Enable more pupils to appreciate better how they can reach their National Curriculum targets by:
  - indicating in marked classwork and homework what National Curriculum level a pupil is achieving currently
  - providing 'next step' guidance indicating what the pupils need to do to improve their levels.

**Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils****2**

Pupils start school with skills above average for their age, helped by their good

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experience in the Reception Year. In most years, pupils make good progress throughout their time in school. A notable exception was in 2010, when Year 6 pupils’ attainment and progress fell. The school responded robustly with a range of learning support measures that resulted in Year 6 pupils making exceptional progress in 2011 to achieve high standards in English. Good progress was evident in a Year 6 lesson where pupils could identify different genres in literature confidently from selected extracts. Strengths in English were even more evident in a Year 4 class, when most pupils made effective use of simile, personification and alliteration in their writing. Mathematics outcomes have also improved, albeit more modestly, and are a focus for further improvement. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make similarly good progress to their peers from lower starting points. The good progress could be seen in a Year 1 mathematics lesson, when less-able and special educational needs and/or disabilities pupils were able to understand tens and units and place value better, helped by careful questioning and support.

The school encourages pupils strongly to take on responsibility and participate fully and the pupils respond very positively. Research into the bicycle shed design and the use of their very good knowledge of healthy eating to decide on allowable snacks and lunchbox contents are all activities led by pupils. So, too, is the gardening club that won a gold award in the local ‘Village in Bloom’ competition and which, in turn, sources the cookery club, supported by a local restaurant. Proposals from lively and passionate school council and Eco-council meetings are presented in assemblies and debated throughout the school. Pupils are very active in the local community through music events and fundraising, as well as in forming links with and gaining funds from the Rotary Club to build a new school garden. Pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is also enhanced considerably by the termly joint activities with two other urban and culturally-mixed schools, as well as residential visits to an equivalent French school and regular links with a school in Grenada.

*These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes*

<b>Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment <sup>1</sup>	2
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
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils’ behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will</b>	<b>2</b>

<sup>1</sup> 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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<b>contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	1
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>1</b>

## How effective is the provision?

Teachers and support staff have positive relationships with pupils, who feel well supported. Resources are used well to support learning. Information and communication technology (ICT), including interactive whiteboards, is used effectively by staff in consistently interesting and engaging lessons. Teachers use questioning well to develop and confirm pupils' understanding and there are many valuable opportunities for pupils to work together and share ideas and to work independently. The school benefits from skilled and committed learning support staff, who support individual pupils ably and contribute to group activities. All lessons have clear learning outcomes, though these are not always adapted sufficiently to match and challenge the widely different abilities in the class. Marking is positive and shows pupils how well they have done. The best practice links progress to pupils' National Curriculum targets which are pasted into the front of the pupils' books.

The school has worked hard to develop a creative and exciting curriculum that makes full use of the considerable environmental resources in and around the school, as well as the wider national and international links. For example, the substantial information and resources gained about Grenada are used throughout the school. The school has placed considerable emphasis on improving pupils' literacy and numeracy, including the use of phonics, which develops reading through sounding letters. There are various accelerated-learning workshops to support older pupils, as well as a strong link with the local professional football club to support literacy and numeracy through the use of ICT.

The school has a good track record for supporting children whose circumstances may make them vulnerable and others with additional needs. Pupils who have struggled elsewhere improve considerably when they come to the school.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>

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## How effective are leadership and management?

The school leadership and all the staff have worked hard to establish an inclusive school that provides a wide range of enriching experiences. The school’s commitment to equal opportunities is reflected in its caring ethos, holistic approach to pupils’ development, its positive contribution to pupils’ good behaviour, high attendance and outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school’s detailed tracking shows that most pupils meet their targets and gaps in performance between different groups are closing. There are good strategies in place to support all pupils, particularly those at risk of falling behind.

Working closely with the headteacher, the governing body brings a considerable range of expertise that has been valuable in managing the enhancement of school facilities. That has included creating woodland area as a Forest School, developing a shared Early Years Foundation Stage/Year 1 play area, establishing a large vegetable garden, installing solar energy and renewing the atrium with an energy-efficient roof. All safeguarding procedures have been met and the governing body works with staff and pupils to ensure all children are safe.

The school has good and extensive partnership links that are used very well to support its work. Its engagement with parents and carers is exceptionally strong and reflected in the very positive parental comments. Well-attended headteacher briefings and consultations each term, various parent and carer information sessions on all aspects of the school work, consultation with parents and carers on all policy reviews, together with many opportunities to attend various assemblies and lunchtimes, all reflect a very open and responsive school. Considerable effort is made to help prepare children for school through teachers’ visits to pre-schools, as well as home visits. There is close liaison with parents and carers to develop learning plans for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Parent and carer volunteers are very active and provide valuable expertise, especially in learning about different religions, such as Islam and Hinduism, as part of pupils’ cultural development. That contributes well to the school’s excellent work in community cohesion, which has been planned and evaluated carefully. The close working with the local community and regular and substantial links with other schools in Britain, France and Grenada, all contribute very well to pupils’ development.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities</b>	<b>2</b>



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<b>met</b>	
<b>The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## Early Years Foundation Stage

The good Early Years Foundation Stage provision ensures that the children make good progress across most areas of development. There is a concerted effort to improve children’s calculation skills and assess reading on entry accurately to avoid overestimates. Those developments have been successful and current assessments indicated that children’s attainment in most areas is above average when they enter Year 1. The good progress is made possible by the good and sometimes outstanding learning opportunities that gain children’s interest and foster their growing independence.

The curriculum covers all areas of learning, with many activities to develop imaginative and structured play, both in and out of the classroom. The activities provide an appropriate balance between adult-led work and opportunities for children to explore for themselves. The skilled staff are sensitive to the children’s needs and help them become more confident learners. In the sessions observed, the learning was well planned and children worked together well, despite being in school for just a few days. A session on number skills demonstrated outstanding practice in terms of the varied tactile and visual resources and varied learning tasks matched to each child’s current development.

Leadership is founded on a thorough knowledge of Early Years Foundation Stage practice. Staff are very effective in providing safe, attractive and well-resourced learning areas, though there was no separate quiet reading area at the time of this inspection. Children are also able to benefit from the nearby woodland area on the school site. Considerable work has been done on assessment and children’s progress is tracked carefully and work recorded in the good learning journals. Parents and carers are encouraged to be involved fully with their children’s education, including working with them in the school. The school has strong links with local pre-schools and staff make home visits to help prepare children for the transfer to school.

*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>2</b>
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Taking into account:	2
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

There is a high level of parental satisfaction reflecting the considerable effort the school makes to consult and inform parents and carers about all aspects of the school. Many parents and carers took the time to write comments praising the school’s leadership, the good quality of teaching and wide range of enrichment opportunities. One parent/carer commented on the way the school, ‘...constantly provides new learning experiences as a Forest School and Eco-school and many trips and extra clubs.’ Another talked of the way parents and carers are consulted regularly, for example, about the recently reviewed behaviour and bullying policies. Yet another of the many out-of-catchment parents and carers said ‘We are delighted with the many opportunities and the dedication and enthusiasm of the staff.’

Inspectors found that the school engages parents and carers, provides a rich and varied curriculum and outstanding opportunities for pupils to be involved in the local and wider community. A few replies to the questionnaire expressed disappointment that, as working parents and carers, too many school events and meetings occurred in the school day and the school is addressing this.

### 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 63 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 203 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	46	73	16	25	0	0	1	2
The school keeps my child safe	51	81	11	17	0	0	1	2
The school informs me about my child’s progress	37	59	22	35	3	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	34	54	24	38	3	5	1	2
The teaching is good at this school	43	68	19	30	1	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	37	59	22	35	1	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	51	81	11	17	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)	46	73	13	21	3	5	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	40	63	17	27	3	5	1	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	31	49	26	41	3	5	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	31	49	27	43	3	5	1	2
The school is led and managed effectively	45	71	15	24	0	0	3	5
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	51	81	11	17	0	0	1	2

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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://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"> <li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li> <li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li> <li>■ The quality of teaching.</li> <li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li> <li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li> </ul>
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.**



21 September 2011

Dear Pupils

### **Inspection of Birchwood Primary School, Ipswich, IP5 3SP**

Thank you for making us so welcome when we came to visit your school. Your school gives you a good education and ensures that you achieve well. It was good to hear that so many of you feel safe in school and find it a fun place to be. We were pleased to see how well behaved you are and how you work together well in lessons. We were very impressed that so many of you take advantage of the many opportunities to take an active part in school, are always ready to help others and to make decisions, such as on the design and size of the bike shed and the outdoor shelter. We could see that you are very committed to healthy lifestyles and how your concern for the environment and awareness of the wider world is helped considerably by your school's excellent curriculum that makes full use of the school's woodland, new garden area and various links with pupils in other schools in Britain, France Grenada.

Very many of your parents and carers told us how much you like school and this is reflected in your high attendance. You get on well with your teachers and like the opportunities to be involved actively in discussion and group work. We spent some time looking at your books and could see the care many of you put into work. Very many of you said how much you appreciated the help you get from teachers and support staff and that most knew your targets in your books. Some of you did not know how your marked classwork can help you to improve you National Curriculum level in literacy and numeracy, so we have asked the teachers to make this clearer. Your teachers plan different activities and visits that make your learning very interesting. However, some of you told us that, sometimes, you would like the challenge of more difficult work. We agree and have asked the teachers to vary class activities, with some harder and others easier, to match work more closely to your particular abilities.

The governing body, headteacher and all the staff are working hard to improve the school further. You can all help by maintaining your high attendance and continuing to take an active part in school activities.

Yours sincerely

Graham Preston  
Lead Inspector (on behalf of the inspection team)

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