

Birch Copse Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109844
Local Authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	377995
Inspection dates	28–29 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Hugh Protherough

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	403
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Simon Beddow
Headteacher	John Micklewhite
Date of previous school inspection	30 January 2007
School address	Wittenham Avenue Tilehurst Reading RG31 5LN
Telephone number	01189 427442
Fax number	01189 454489
Email address	office.birchcopse@westberks.org

Age group	4–11
Inspection date(s)	28–29 November 2011
Inspection number	377995

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

[Piccadilly Gate](#)
[Store St](#)
[Manchester](#)
[M1 2WD](#)

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2011



Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. They observed 26 lessons and 14 teachers. Inspectors met with parents and carers, members of the governing body and staff. In addition to informal conversations in lessons, they held meetings with the school council and groups of pupils, including some from Years 2 and 6. They observed the school's work and looked at a range of information, including samples of pupils' work, the school improvement plan, curriculum and lesson planning and the tracking of pupil progress. They analysed the responses from 264 parent and carer questionnaires as well as those from staff and pupils.

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

- Whether the school's record of high attainment in English and mathematics has been sustained and is apparent in the other subjects of the National Curriculum.
- The extent to which the school's curriculum and the pace and challenge of teaching are well matched to pupils' abilities and interests.
- How far senior and middle leaders can demonstrate the impact of their work on improving provision and raising attainment.

Information about the school

The school is larger than average. About half of the pupils come from the immediate catchment area, the remainder from further afield. The great majority of pupils are White British. Other groups include Mixed White and Black Caribbean and Mixed White and Asian. No pupils are at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals has doubled in recent years but remains much lower than the national average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. This group includes a number of pupils with autistic spectrum disorder and physical disabilities such as visual impairment.

Since the previous inspection a new headteacher and leadership team have been appointed. There is a new staff team in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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 has improved considerably since its previous inspection and provides its pupils with an outstanding quality of education. All of the strengths identified in the previous inspection report have been sustained and many aspects considerably improved. This is reflected in the exceptionally strong relationship between home and school and high levels of satisfaction expressed by parents and carers.

Pupils' results in the Year 6 national tests in English and mathematics continue to be significantly higher than the national average. The school's thorough approaches to tracking its performance show that progress for most pupils is at least good, while those with special needs and/or disabilities make excellent gains from their starting points. Pupils' achievement is outstanding. Highly effective arrangements for care, guidance and support and outstanding partnerships underpin pupils' well-being and all-round development. Their enjoyment of school is reflected in high levels of attendance, positive response in lessons and excellent behaviour. Pupils are proud of their school community and make a significant contribution to its development.

The reason for the school's sustained performance lies in the consistently good quality of most teaching and an outstanding curriculum. Teachers ensure that pupils enjoy their work by making creative and coherent links between the subjects of the National Curriculum. Learning is enriched through the excellent use of theme days, educational visits and a host of effective partnership activities. Lessons progress at a brisk pace and pupils say their learning is enlivened by interesting tasks and challenging activities. The skilled work of teaching assistants and appropriate modification of resources to support those with special educational needs are central to the excellent progress made by these pupils. Though the core of teaching is good, not enough is outstanding to accelerate progress still further. In English and mathematics, teachers make skilled use of assessment information to ensure a close match of task to pupils' abilities. This is not yet a consistent feature in the other subjects of the National Curriculum.

The leadership team has correctly identified the need to improve provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage. A new teaching team has improved the learning environment and ensures the children are happy, safe and achieving well. However, the quality of adults' questioning is not always sharp enough to extend children's learning, and assessments, while accurate, do not consistently identify the next steps children need to take to reach the higher levels.

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

The reason for the school's success lies in the outstanding work of the leadership team and the decisive actions taken to drive improvement. Individual pupil progress is tracked with rigour and staff are held to account for the performance of their pupils at regular meetings about progress. Samples of pupils' work are checked and lessons monitored. The results of these activities support rigorous self-evaluation, which is used to inform an ambitious, but realistic, school improvement plan. Sustained high attainment, improved achievement, provision and the successful development of middle leadership are all compelling examples of the school's outstanding capacity to improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by ensuring that the close match of task to pupils' interests and abilities observed in English and mathematics is consistently in evidence in the other subjects of the National Curriculum.
This should be evident in 80% of lessons by May 2012.
- Increase further the proportion of children achieving the higher levels in the Early Years Foundation Stage areas of learning by improving the quality of:
 - adults' questioning skills in order that children's thinking and understanding is suitably challenged and extended
 - day-to-day assessment, so that staff always identify the next steps children need to take in their learning.

This should be evident in 80% of observations in the Reception classes by March 2012.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

'Teachers make learning fun,' was the considered and enthusiastic response made by a group of Year 6 pupils to the inspectors about their learning. This positive attitude is evident throughout the school as pupils of all backgrounds and abilities apply themselves diligently at work and play.

Since the previous inspection pupils' performance in mathematics has been strengthened and matches that in English. In Year 6, pupils thrive on the pace and challenge provided by their teachers. Their mental calculation skills are strong and they are motivated by purposeful activities such as calculating probability or helping Willy Wonka calculate the costs of launching a new brand of confectionery. Elsewhere the inspectors witnessed a wealth of pupil achievement in a range of subjects including information and communication technology, history, art and design technology. For example, Year 4 pupils have been enthused by their work on Vikings. They are learning to behave like researchers and presented their work to their parents before settling down to a Viking feast, complete with vegetarian option. The

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

next day, all of Years 1 and 2 performed 'Countdown to Christmas,' singing and dancing with confidence to a packed audience of delighted family members.

Pupils say they feel safe, secure and valued and speak intelligently about how to ensure the safety of themselves and others. Behaviour is of a consistently high standard. Pupils are polite, considerate and offer a friendly and courteous welcome to visitors. Observations of pupils such as those with autistic spectrum disorder or other special educational needs and/or disabilities show they are cared for outstandingly well, and helped to develop independence and to play a full part in the life of the school. Pupils have an excellent appreciation of what it means to live a healthy life. They talk knowledgeably about the importance of diet and exercise and offer persuasive evidence of the ways they put this into action in their own lives. They enjoy physical education lessons and most take part in the excellent variety of clubs provided before and after school through sports partnerships. The school has worked effectively to improve attendance to the current high levels and punctuality is excellent. Pupils' extremely well-developed personal attributes and outstanding achievement mean that they are very well prepared for the next stage of their education.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

How effective is the provision?

The school's creative curriculum has a tangible, positive impact on learning. Pupils are swift to recount the many memorable experiences they enjoy at school and the thoughtful ways that teachers help them to make links in their learning between

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

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

subjects. For instance, one pupil recalled: ‘I really enjoyed burning our model houses for the Great Fire of London,’ and subsequently spoke about learning that spanned literacy, mathematics, design and technology and science. Parents and carers are keenly aware of how this approach supports their children’s development and are frequently involved in either the ‘starting event’ or the ‘closing event,’ such as the evaluation of the Year 4 Viking project. In addition to exciting activities within school, pupils benefit from an excellent variety of educational visits and residential experiences that enable them to learn more about the wider world. There is an outstanding variety of extra-curricular activities spanning sports and cultural activities which are enthusiastically subscribed to by pupils of all backgrounds and abilities.

Lesson planning is detailed and incisive, catering thoughtfully for the range of abilities in each class. The effective deployment of teaching assistants makes an outstanding contribution to learning, especially in the support of pupils with special educational needs and those with disabilities such as visual impairment. Many lessons have brisk, well-focused openings. Well-prepared resources frequently grab pupils’ interest. For instance, one lesson opened with the discovery of a letter written by Friar Lawrence to Romeo. Subsequent discussion and penetrating questioning by the teacher rapidly developed pupils’ appreciation of plot and motive. Teachers’ thorough approaches to assessment ensure that pupils benefit from good quality feedback on their work. There has been successful action to consolidate target setting so that in mathematics and English pupils are clear about what they need to do to improve. In these subjects pupils are increasingly engaged in evaluating their own learning and teachers are diligent in responding to this.

While the core of teaching is good, there is scope to increase the amount that is outstanding. In subjects other than English and mathematics, the match of task to pupils’ abilities is not always sharp enough. Pupils are enthused by work in a wide range of subjects, but the level of challenge is not yet as consistent.

The quality of care, guidance and support has improved considerably and is outstanding. The school offers an attractive and well-maintained learning environment that engages pupils’ interest and celebrates their work. The staff team pay excellent attention to identifying the needs of pupils in circumstances that make them more vulnerable and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Strong partnerships and links with a range of agencies such as special schools, health and welfare ensure a raft of additional expertise that enhances the support provided for families and their children. Highly effective transition arrangements have developed as a result of close working with local pre-school providers and secondary school.

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

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

The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The relationship between school and parents and carers is exceptionally strong. The overwhelming majority are delighted with the work of the school, the quality of the information they receive and the many opportunities to support their children’s learning. Several wrote to commend the approachability of staff and the outstanding example of headteacher and deputy headteacher in their willingness to consult, listen and engage.

Staff morale is also high because the headteacher and senior leadership team are successfully building staff confidence and improving the quality of education. Since the previous inspection, staff at all levels have responded enthusiastically to opportunities to develop leadership roles and hold a strong sense of accountability in their areas of responsibility. Individual talents and interests are encouraged, valued and shared. The leadership for English and mathematics is very effective. They have an accurate view of pupils’ attainment and progress and any variations in provision that require improvement. The assessment tracking system enables senior leaders to identify with precision the achievements of each pupil. As a result, ambitious targets for individuals and groups systematically inform the review of pupils’ progress and the performance management of staff.

The school has excellent oversight of the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The teacher responsible knows the story behind their assessment data, so that if a pupil appears to be falling behind she can point to the reasons that may underpin this, as well as the action taken to help them to catch up. In some cases, additional support such as the outstanding partnership with a local special school helps these pupils to make excellent progress. The narrowing gap between pupils’ attainment in English and mathematics is a further good example of how the school takes concerted and effective action to promote equality of opportunity.

The governing body contains a wide range of experience and expertise. They are fully involved in the life of the school and offer good support and constructive challenge. There is regular consultation with stakeholders and appropriate plans to extend this to include face-to-face meetings at events such as parents’ evenings. The school adopts excellent approaches to all aspects of risk assessment and the safeguarding of pupils. The school’s exemplary work in this area is used to support training elsewhere in the local authority.

Pupils get on noticeably well together and effective plans promote successful engagement with other schools locally, but with less evidence of impact at a national level. Pupils speak knowledgeably and sensitively about their own community and

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

show good appreciation of the social and cultural diversity of the United Kingdom and the wider world.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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	2
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

The data for last year’s Reception children indicate that they made good progress from their starting points. By the end of the year the proportion working securely at average standards across the six areas of learning was comfortably above the national average in all areas of learning. The current group of pupils is also making good progress from their starting points.

New members of the Early Years Foundation Stage team have been well supported by senior leaders. There has been successful investment to improve further the quality of resources in both indoor and outdoor classrooms. Children settle swiftly into the world of school because they have close and trusting relationships with the staff. They arrive happily with their parents and carers each morning and show great confidence in daily routines. The outstanding partnership between home and school is clearly evidenced in the positive comments made by families about the sensitive approaches for the induction of children into Reception.

Staff planning ensures a good mix of adult-led and child-initiated activities indoors and out. Once they are at work and play the children are purposeful and demonstrate high levels of confidence in their chosen tasks which contribute strongly to their good outcomes. Higher-attaining children enjoy writing legible invitations to a Christmas party. Others sustain imaginative play as Father Christmas’s elves and show great dexterity in wrapping up presents in his shop. Most are confident users of computers and other technologies and put these skills to good use tackling games

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

involving reading and number. Many choose to sit and select a book to ‘read’ or share with a friend. Children’s highly developed social skills mean that they make the most of all that is on offer and make good progress.

While adults successfully provide this rich variety of learning opportunities, they are not yet wholly effective in extending learning. Sometimes they talk for too long and delay the start of purposeful activity. Staff work alongside the children, but their use of language and their questioning skills are not always sharp enough to probe children’s understanding and accelerate learning. There is evidence of focused assessments that are building into a compelling picture of children’s achievements, but these seldom include reference to the next steps that might accelerate progress further.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

At 66% the proportion of parents returning questionnaires was much higher than the national average. The overwhelming majority of parents express positive views about their children’s experience of school and in particular the attention given to keeping them safe and healthy, and the quality of teaching. A few parents feel there is sometimes insufficient homework, while others wrote to say there is too much. Inspectors judge that the school and governors consult parents and carers on a regular basis and have an excellent range of activities that enable parents and carers to engage with their children’s learning. A handful of parents feel that while support for the more able and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities is very effective, they are concerned about those ‘in the middle’. Inspectors judge that pupils are making good progress, regardless of background or ability.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Birch Copse 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 264 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 403 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	183	69	79	30	1	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	193	73	68	26	2	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	132	50	125	47	7	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	128	48	125	47	7	3	1	0
The teaching is good at this school	164	62	96	36	2	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	149	56	107	41	5	2	2	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	149	56	111	42	3	1	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)	138	52	112	42	5	2	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	141	53	108	41	11	4	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	126	48	120	45	8	3	4	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	120	45	122	46	8	3	7	3
The school is led and managed effectively	142	54	111	42	6	2	4	2
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	170	64	87	33	6	2	1	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	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).

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.



30 November 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Birch Copse Primary School, Tilehurst RG31 5LN

Thank you very much for your friendly welcome during the recent inspection of your school. It was a pleasure to meet you all and to see your school community getting on so well together. We think that the way you respect each other and talk intelligently about the things that are important to you is outstanding. Your behaviour is excellent and you work well with the staff to keep each other safe. You make the most of the wonderful variety of clubs and activities and have an excellent understanding of how to live healthily.

Your results in national tests are high and you are achieving very well. We agree with you that this is because teachers make learning fun. The inspectors saw lots of exciting work throughout the school and are pleased to see that you are getting used to solving problems, working cooperatively and using your literacy, numeracy and computer skills in lots of different ways.

You told us that, 'Birch Copse is a good place to be at school.' We agree and think your school is outstanding, but like all successful schools it wants to improve further. We think that even more of your lessons could be outstanding and have asked the teachers to make sure that the work they set you in subjects like science and history gives each of you just the right amount of challenge to make you think hard and develop new learning. Children in Reception are doing well and if the adults ask the right sorts of questions when you are working we think you will make even faster progress.

It was good to see some of 'Countdown to Christmas,' and to watch Years 1 and 2 performing so well for their families. I hope that the production of 'Romeo and Juliet' is equally successful.

Yours sincerely
Hugh Protherough
Lead inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone **0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.**