

Birchwood CE Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111304
Local authority	Warrington
Inspection number	378271
Inspection dates	21–22 June 2012
Lead inspector	Nigel Cromey-Hawke

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	201
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Stuart Robinson
Headteacher	Brenda Bland
Date of previous school inspection	12 January 2009
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Introduction

Inspection team

Nigel Cromey-Hawke
Doreen Davenport

Additional Inspector
Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 12 lessons, including joint observations with the headteacher, taught by nine teachers. The inspectors also held meetings with members of the governing body, staff, parents, carers and groups of pupils. The inspectors observed the school's work, carried out a thorough scrutiny of pupils' work, and looked at a wide range of documentation, including development planning, safeguarding arrangements, self-evaluation records, relevant policies and performance data. The inspectors took account of the responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. The inspectors also scrutinised questionnaires from 24 parents and carers, three staff and 25 pupils.

Information about the school

This is a smaller than average sized primary school. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is broadly average. The number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well above average. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well above average. The number of pupils leaving or joining the school partway through a year is well above average. The school did not meet the government's current floor standard last year, which sets the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress. The school operates its own breakfast club. The school has many awards, including Healthy School status, Artsmark Silver and the Activemark. There have been significant staffing changes recently.

There is an independently managed children's centre on site that is subject to a separate inspection. The report for this can be found on the Ofsted website.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	3

Key Findings

- Birchwood is a satisfactory school. It is not yet good because teaching is not yet of a consistently good quality to ensure pupils’ progress accelerates evenly across the school and impacts fully on attainment. The school has strengths in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in the use of information and communication technology (ICT) by pupils to enhance their learning. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- Achievement is satisfactory. From very low starting points, children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress. In Years 1 to 6, progress is satisfactory overall and is improving, at times rapidly although not consistently so. Attainment by the end of Year 6 is below average in reading, writing and mathematics, but there are clear signs of improvement, especially in mathematics. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, as well as those who join the school partway through a year, also make satisfactory progress because of the extra support they receive.
- Teaching is satisfactory overall and improving, although it is not consistent across Years 1 to 6. Good teaching features good planning and good use of assessment to provide interesting activities that challenge and engage pupils well. Where teaching is less effective, the pace of learning is not sufficiently rapid and planned activities do not always provide enough challenge, especially for more able pupils.
- The behaviour and safety of pupils are satisfactory. Behaviour and attitudes to learning are good in many lessons, although occasionally less so when teaching is not good. Almost all pupils say they feel safe and well looked after. Attendance has improved since the last inspection.
- Leadership and management of teaching and performance are satisfactory. Gaps in pupils’ skills and knowledge have been identified and targeted and these are being closed as progress accelerates, for example in mathematics. The headteacher has challenged weak areas of the school’s performance and improvements are being seen in outcomes. The governing body has good day-to-day knowledge of the school but its

understanding of how to hold the school to account for its performance, whilst improving, is not yet as strong.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to be consistently good or better and hence further accelerate progress, raise attainment and improve achievement by:
 - ensuring the pace of lessons fully maintains pupils' interest, engagement and good behaviour
 - further develop pupils' writing skills so that they can communicate their learning more effectively
 - providing higher levels of challenge by ensuring all teachers make full use of assessment information to devise activities that meet the needs of all pupils, especially the more able.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - developing the monitoring role of subject leaders so that they can more fully contribute to whole-school self-evaluation through the direct observation of the quality of teaching in their areas of responsibility.
 - providing the governing body with suitable training to strengthen their understanding of the school's performance so that they are better able to hold it to account.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Children enter the Nursery classes with skills and knowledge that are exceptionally low when compared with those expected for their age, particularly in communication, language and literacy, and in personal development. Children make good progress across most areas of learning within the Early Years Foundation Stage because of the clear expectations of staff and good routines that develop their confidence.

Pupils in Years 1 to 6 make satisfactory progress overall. This includes disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. Pupils known to be eligible for free school meals make progress in line with other groups. As progress accelerates pupils' attainment is rising and any gaps in their skills and knowledge are closing. This is because more teaching is good and occasionally better. For example, in an outstanding Year 5 mathematics lesson, observed jointly by one inspector and the headteacher, a 'mathematics Olympics' gave pupils the opportunity to devise their own number problems, based upon their individual learning targets, and to resolve these using notepad computers. A real sense of enjoyment in mathematics was engendered, and especially high level skills in the use of ICT were developed.

Attainment by the time pupils leave the school is below average but is rising after a dip in 2011 and is showing clear improvement across many areas. Much work has been undertaken since the previous inspection to improve pupils' writing skills. In most classes, this is now close to average but is lower in current Years 2 and 5, which limits these pupils' ability to effectively communicate their learning. Attainment in reading is low in Year 2 and

below average but rising in Year 6, where pupils are currently attaining close to average levels.

Almost all of the parents and carers who returned the inspection questionnaire believe that their children make good progress. Inspection evidence is that pupils make satisfactory but improving progress.

Quality of teaching

Almost all parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire feel that teaching in the school is good. Inspection found that teaching is satisfactory. Features of good or better teaching include the relationships between teachers and pupils, teachers' good subject knowledge and good planning that ensures that lesson activities meet the needs of all pupils, especially disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. Many teachers, in the best lessons, make good use of the assessment information provided by the system to track pupils' progress to plan interesting and relevant lessons that engage pupils well with their learning. Pupils' speaking and listening skills are often well promoted, helping them to explain their learning and grow in social confidence. In a Year 2 lesson observed, for example, pupils showed high levels of concentration in accurately sounding out letters and words to help them read and understand a story, which then formed the basis for extended writing.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall because of inconsistencies in the level of challenge for pupils and the pace of lessons. Where teaching is less effective, introductions to lessons are sometimes too long, pupils' learning targets are not used as effectively as in the best lessons, and pupils' learning is not moved on sufficiently rapidly to ensure that their interest is fully maintained. This leads to some low level disengagement and off-task behaviour. In satisfactory lessons, the rigour in the use of pupils' performance data seen in the best lessons is not evident. There is an over-reliance in some lessons on the use of standardised worksheets that have little in the way of graded activities to meet the full range of pupils' abilities. As a result, activities do not stretch pupils' understanding, especially the more able.

Teaching promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development satisfactorily, helped by a suitable curriculum that has a strong focus upon developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills and their personal development.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The behaviour and safety of pupils' over time are satisfactory. The school focuses upon developing children's social skills and behaviour from the moment they enter the Nursery class. Clear expectations are established quickly and contribute to a generally calm, well-ordered and safe school environment. Many pupils also get a healthy start to their day in school within the breakfast club, reflecting the school's award in this area.

Almost all parents and carers who returned the inspection survey are highly supportive of the levels of pastoral care provided by the school and consider that behaviour is at least satisfactory and well managed. Almost all pupils say they feel safe in school and enjoy their learning and their parents and carers agree. Relationships between pupils and adults are good. Behaviour in the best lessons is also good, but there is evidence of occasional low level disruption in less well-taught lessons. Pupils have a clear understanding of the different

types of bullying, because pupils are taught how to identify and deal with it as part of their curriculum. A small minority of pupils expressed concerns about behaviour and bullying within their questionnaire returns. Pupils questioned, however, were of the view that the school deals with any such issues effectively through the use of behaviour targets and a wide range of rewards and consequences, as well as the support pupils themselves provide as trained playground leaders. The school has worked very hard since the previous inspection to improve attendance, with noticeable impact. Overall attendance is average, and persistent absence is below that of similar schools.

Leadership and management

There are highly focused plans in place to improve the effectiveness of the school. The impact of initiatives can be seen in the improvement in pupils' progress, especially in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in upper Key Stage 2, and in attendance. As a result, the school demonstrates satisfactory capacity to sustain improvement.

Senior leaders monitor the quality of teaching and learning systematically and manage the performance of the school satisfactorily. This resulted in the identification of a small amount of less effective teaching last year that has been tackled through staff training and heightened expectations. There have also been changes made in staffing. As a result, teaching is at least satisfactory over time with examples of good and occasionally outstanding practice, although this is not yet consistently established across the school. Subject leaders carry out regular monitoring of planning and are involved in the termly pupils' progress meetings to check for underachievement. Their direct involvement in monitoring the quality of teaching is, however, underdeveloped, with the result that they do not at present contribute sufficiently to whole-school self-evaluation.

The governing body has been significantly restructured and is very actively involved in the life of the school, with dedicated links between individual governors and classes, subject areas and aspects of its work. Some members of the governing body have yet to receive appropriate training, however, to enable them to fully support and challenge the performance of the school.

The curriculum is suitably broad and balanced and meets the needs of pupils satisfactorily, giving them enjoyable and memorable experiences, especially through its use of ICT. Good use is made of partnership working with other schools to provide French studies. Pupils also benefit from outdoor pursuits residential visits and links with schools in Poland and France. As such, it supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development appropriately. The school recognises that it has more to do to engage some parents and carers with the life of the school. The school ensures that all groups of pupils are given equal opportunities to succeed and does not tolerate discrimination of any type. Safeguarding requirements and checks meet statutory requirements.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



25 June 2012

Dear Pupils,

Inspection of Birchwood CE Primary School, Warrington, WA3 6QG

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave me and my colleague when we inspected your school recently. You were very friendly and enthusiastic about what you do.

Birchwood CE Primary is a satisfactory school. You make a good start to your learning in the Nursery and Reception classes because of the good teaching, well-planned and interesting activities and good levels of care. Your progress throughout the rest of the school is satisfactory. The levels of attainment the vast majority of you reach by the time you leave the school in Year 6 are below average, but these are improving well under the leadership of the headteacher, staff and governing body. Those of you who find learning difficult are making satisfactory progress overall, but there are signs that this is also improving due to the many additional support classes being operated by teaching assistants. The school looks after you well and you say you feel safe. Behaviour, although satisfactory over time, is improving and is often good in lessons. Your attendance is average and also improving strongly. Well done! The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. To help the school improve further, I have asked it to do the following things:

- improve the quality of all teaching to at least good and improve your attainment in reading, writing and mathematics
- improve the monitoring by subject leaders of what goes on across the school
- provide the governing body with training to help them support and challenge the school's work.

You can help by telling your teachers how best you learn and if you have any problems. I wish you the best or the future.

Yours sincerely

Nigel Cromey-Hawke
Lead inspector

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