

Birchwood Nursery School

Birchway, Crawford Road, Hatfield, AL10 0PD

Inspection dates 29–30 January 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Children from different backgrounds and abilities settle very quickly into Birchwood Nursery. This is because staff are always available to speak to parents and carers at the beginning and ends of sessions.
- The children make outstanding progress from their various starting points. This is because staff use practical activities extremely successfully to develop children's understanding in all areas of learning.
- The children enjoy being at the nursery and their behaviour is outstanding. This is because staff handle little incidents very calmly and with a great deal of expertise.
- Staff use questions very thoughtfully to capture children's imagination and keep them interested for considerable amounts of time.
- Occasionally, staff do not tell the children about whether they have reached what they have been aiming for, so the children are not clear whether they have been successful.
- The nursery has improved in a large number of ways since the last inspection. For example, it checks very carefully on how well the children are learning to speak and communicate.
- The headteacher's excellent leadership means that staff are keen to improve the nursery. Staff have had very useful further training on how to teach children to read. This means that the children have extremely valuable daily sessions that teach them about the sounds which letters make.
- Managers, leaders and governors work outstandingly well as a team and so they make sure that the quality of teaching and children's progress is as high as it can be. They keep a very close watch on how staff improve their skills.
- Parents and carers are very pleased with how the nursery helps their child to learn new things. One parent summed up their thoughts when they wrote, 'My child has made huge progress since arriving at the nursery and as a result he is starting school a happy, confident and independent little boy.'
- Although parents are told which targets their child is working towards, a few said that they would like a copy of the targets with tips on how they can help their child to meet them.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed 10 lessons or part lessons and saw nine different members of staff teaching. Three were joint observations with the headteacher.
- Discussions were held with senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors, nursery staff, parents, children and a representative from the local authority.
- The inspector observed children's behaviour and scrutinised the nursery's safeguarding procedures.
- The inspector took account of the 54 responses to the nursery's questionnaire, which were collected in July 2012, and 19 responses to the online 'Parent View' survey. The questionnaires from nine staff were taken in account.
- The inspector observed the work of the nursery and looked at documentation including teachers' planning, the development plan, tracking documentation about children's progress in all the areas of learning, performance management documentation and minutes from meetings held by the governing body.

Inspection team

Jackie Cousins, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is larger than most nursery schools.
- Children are taught in two open-plan areas with a small room off each of the main areas. There is one shared outside area.
- Most children attend for five part-time sessions each week.
- The proportion of children known to be eligible for free school meals is above the national average.
- No children are known to be eligible for the pupil premium funding because schools only receive this funding for older pupils.
- The proportion of children who need extra help (either at early years action, early years action plus, or who are undergoing assessment for a statement of special educational needs) is above average.
- Most children are from White British backgrounds and a small number are from minority ethnic backgrounds. A few children are in the early stages of learning to speak English as an additional language.
- The childcare provision on site offers early education for two-year-olds for 15 hours a week, childcare for 50 weeks a year, breakfast, after-school and holiday services. These provisions are subject to separate inspection arrangements.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise children's skills, knowledge and understanding to even higher levels by:
 - ensuring all staff talk regularly to each child about how well they have met their personal targets
 - making sure, every three months, parent and carer receives a copy of the targets that their child is working towards with some tips on how to help them.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- The children start at the nursery with a wide range of knowledge and understanding, but a significant proportion are behind in their socialising, speaking and writing skills and their knowledge of the world. Due to outstanding staff expertise, they make excellent progress and by the time they join Reception classes they reach levels that are above those expected for their age especially in communication, language, literacy and personal development.
- The children who are learning to speak English as an additional language also make excellent progress. The staff work together very effectively to make sure that these children learn to talk in English and they have regular meetings to think about the best ways to work with different groups and all children. The children known to be eligible for free school meals make as much progress as the others, because the provision works in the same way for all of them.
- Boys and girls achieve equal success in learning to speak, read, write, socialise, move, and use mathematics because the teaching is adjusted very thoughtfully to each individual. For instance, more-able children learned to recognise half a shape very well because the member of staff demonstrated very clearly how to half a biscuit accurately.
- The children, including those from minority ethnic groups, learn to write and make marks very carefully because everyday they are encouraged to use writing equipment. For instance, they learn to draw small, medium and big objects because of the use of small model animals and staff support. As a result the children learn exceptionally effectively how to control a pencil or pen.
- Teachers and support staff give children the confidence to speak clearly. This means that the children make excellent progress in learning to talk to other people. Many children whose speech was not as developed as expected when they started at the Nursery, catch up swiftly and leave with speaking skills that are the same as other children of their age.
- The children learn to read very efficiently because they regularly gather together in small groups and take part in adult-led activities. They learn happily about the sounds that letters make. This was seen when they found objects which begin with a particular letter and shared them very thoughtfully with the group.
- Disabled children and those who have special educational needs are given outstanding support which is modified very closely to their individual requirements. Last year all children with additional needs reached expected levels of skills by the time they left the Nursery. They made the same excellent progress as other children did.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- The nursery's teaching contains a great number of strengths which include the highly creative way staff work with children. Staff think extremely carefully about the time they give children to think, and ask questions which encourage them to be imaginative. For example, the children learned to make up a fascinating story about going to the moon because the teaching developed their imagination exceptionally well.
- Staff are exceedingly skilled at building children's self-esteem, including those who need extra assistance. This means that the children confidently explore the world for themselves, follow

their own interests and extend their learning by working with a rich variety of equipment. Staff develop the children's knowledge and skills so that they look for several different ways to solve a setback. For instance, the children learned to build a strong wall because they worked with bricks and experimented to see how they are could be combined securely.

- All the teachers and support staff work together effectively to provide an extremely exciting range of experiences for children that enhance their understanding of this country and the world. For instance, photographs show that last year children made up wonderful dragon dances because staff created extremely imaginative activities when they learnt about the Chinese New Year celebrations.
- Staff create an atmosphere in the nursery which is extremely successful in encouraging children to concentrate. This means that there are terrific opportunities for the children to learn for considerable amounts of time in both inside and outside areas. For example, children learned very effectively about what happens on a train journey because they moved freely from an inside train station to shops and a seaside in the outside area. This experience was exceptionally good in encouraging them to describe what they did and saw on their journey to the seaside and shops because staff focused questioning so expertly.
- All staff check the children's progress and make notes about what they are able to do. They keep detailed records and chart progress in individual folders. These show a very comprehensive picture of each child's achievements over their time in the Nursery. Occasionally, staff miss opportunities to discuss with individual children, in simple language, whether they have successfully reached their personal target and so the children are not totally clear about how well they are doing.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The children come to the Nursery on a regular basis and very eagerly start activities within seconds of their arrival. They are extremely clear about everyday routines. They very thoughtfully wait their turn and share equipment. The children have excellent opportunities to make friends. For example, they learn extremely productively to play musical instruments and sing songs together.
 - The children become very independent because they have free access to an exciting range of tools and materials and staff expect children to do things for themselves. The children learn to persist when activities are hard because staff support these skills very successfully. Children learn to push pedals and ride a bike because staff give them positive comments and encourage them to keep trying when they are stuck.
 - The children learn to take little risks and decide how to keep themselves and others safe. For example, during one session they learned how to move around the equipment very safely when they made an obstacle course.
 - The nursery handles occasional behavioural incidents with children, including those who need extra support, exceptionally thoughtfully, and works diligently with children and their families when these very unusual events happen. This ensures the children understand swiftly why certain behaviours are not acceptable. Staff are exceedingly well skilled at supervising children and take a very positive attitude to helping them make the most sensible choices.
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The leadership and management are outstanding

- All staff said that they were proud to work at the nursery. This is because the leadership of the headteacher and others at all levels is outstanding and the nursery has extremely successful systems for deciding what works well and what is less useful. All leaders and staff are continuously looking for ways to improve the nursery. For instance, since the last inspection many staff have obtained extra qualifications as a result of support from senior leaders.
 - Teachers collect and make use of many ideas they have gained from training courses. For example, the nursery is trialling a new way of collecting information about how well children are doing using information and communication technology. This new system is very successfully encouraging staff to use guidance on what children are expected to do at certain ages and stages of development. The headteacher and staff keep an extremely close eye on how much progress children are making in all areas of learning.
 - The nursery's improvement plan is well thought out and it contains useful ideas about ways to develop the school. Senior leaders and governors keep an exceedingly secure watch on whether the nursery is likely to meet its targets and they frequently consider whether they can do even better. Staff always adopt the best ways of working with children and this ensures they make outstanding progress in all areas of learning.
 - The nursery works in partnership with parents and carers very effectively. At least once a term the staff use children's records to discuss with parents and carers how well every child is getting on. Some parents said they would like a copy of the targets that their child is working towards with some advice written down on how to help their child meet them.
 - Many activities are planned which promote high levels of skill and strength of mind among the children. For example, children learn to control the most up-to-date information and communication technology using their fingers and so for instance, they were able to use this equipment to create very imaginative pictures of snowmen.
 - Staff have an enormous commitment to the care and welfare of the children in the Nursery. It works very efficiently with other professionals and so the children regularly gain the benefit of working with specialist staff.
 - Children from different backgrounds have a wealth of opportunities to play together. Many topics help them to learn very successfully about different people's cultures in this country and abroad. For example, the children learn about European fairy tales and sing songs from Great Britain and abroad.
 - The local authority keeps in very regular contact with the nursery and provides extremely effective support and challenge. It uses the nursery as a centre of excellence.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body fulfils its duties very well. It meets all the requirements about making the nursery a safe place and makes sure that staff are suitably checked and trained in child protection. The Chair of the Governing Body plays a very important role in making decisions. Governors complete training courses which enable them to hold the nursery to account extremely well. They check the quality of teaching by asking questions about data which shows how much progress is made by different groups of children. This is because the governors have a very good level of knowledge of school data. They make sure that decisions about how money is used are made very thoughtfully so that they always give best value. The
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governors have excellent systems to decide whether teachers and other staff should be rewarded with salary increases and they review targets for the headteacher.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	117069
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	401641

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

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–4
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	97
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue Jones
Headteacher	Kathryn Evans
Date of previous school inspection	25–26 February 2010
Telephone number	01707 262648
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