

Birchwood Avenue Primary School

Birchwood Avenue, Hatfield, AL10 0PS

Inspection dates 19–20 March 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Children join Reception with skills below the levels expected for their age and leave Year 6 with average attainment. This represents good achievement.
- Progress is good and rising because teaching is improving and this is raising achievement, particularly in mathematics.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress because they receive well-planned support.
- Teaching is consistently good and some is outstanding. Teachers and teaching assistants know pupils very well. Relationships between adults and pupils are warm and trusting and help pupils to learn.
- Pupils enjoy school. They behave well and feel safe.
- The headteacher keeps a very close check on the quality of teaching and has been the driving force behind improvements. This, together with the provision of good training opportunities for staff, has led to marked improvements in teaching and achievement.
- Governors have high aspirations for all pupils. Strong governance and good support from the local authority have helped the school become much more effective.

It is not yet outstanding because

- Pupils' attainment and progress are not as good in writing as they are in reading and mathematics.
- Attendance figures are below average. A few pupils are persistently absent.

Information about this inspection

- Teaching and learning were observed in 15 lessons, and pupils’ work was examined, especially in English and mathematics. Some observations were joint visits with the headteacher.
- Short visits were made to watch groups of pupils who were learning phonics (the sounds that letters make). One assembly was also observed.
- Meetings were held with staff, pupils, a representative of the local authority and the Chair of the Governing Body. One meeting with pupils was dedicated to a discussion of reading, with an opportunity for pupils to read aloud.
- Informal discussions with pupils took place at breaks and lunchtimes, and the house captains met with an inspector.
- Account was taken of the 15 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and 21 staff questionnaires. Parents’ involvement in school life was discussed with senior leaders. At the beginning of one day, informal conversations were held with parents in the school playground.
- A range of documentation was looked at, including records relating to pupils’ progress, behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Richard Blackmore, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Victoria Turner

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is above average, as is the proportion who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is above the national average. (This is additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, those in local authority care and pupils with a parent in the armed forces.)
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is above average.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus, or with a statement of special educational needs, is average.
- All pupils are educated on site. The school does not use alternative provision to support any of its pupils.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum standards for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards and increase progress in writing by:
 - giving pupils more challenging writing tasks, especially the more able pupils, and more chance to develop their writing skills in subjects other than English.
 - setting targets for pupils to help them improve the weaker aspects of their writing
- Work more closely with the small minority of families whose children do not attend school regularly, so that attendance improves.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Standards are improving and pupils across the school make good progress. By the time they leave pupils' results are average in both English and mathematics.
- Children in the reception class make good progress often from below average starting points. They settle in to school quickly and enjoy a wide variety of interesting and exciting activities with a good balance between learning activities that are led by the teacher and opportunities to work independently and explore things for themselves.
- Achievement is especially good in mathematics across the school because pupils concentrate well on the tasks they are given in lessons because these are interesting and motivating. They enjoy learning through 'hands-on' activities, for example, handling money in a lesson on adding up and subtracting. They respond well to teachers' probing questions which are carefully designed to help deepen and broaden their understanding.
- Standards of reading are average by the end of Year 6. The most-able pupils in Years 2 and 6 read fluently and with very good expression. In writing, however, only a few show skills in advance of those expected for their age. This is because there is a lack of challenge at times preventing more pupils reaching above-average standards and pupils are not getting regular opportunities to develop their writing in other subjects.
- Different groups of pupils including those from minority ethnic heritages, make good progress from their individual starting points. Carefully directed support, including that provided by teaching assistants has had a positive impact on the achievement of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. These pupils are making consistently good progress across the school and achieving as well as their peers.
- The school ensures that everyone has an equal chance of success and is well prepared for secondary school. This includes pupils from different ethnic backgrounds, and demonstrates the school's commitment to not tolerating any form of discrimination.
- Pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium benefit from the additional one-to-one and small group support the school has provided. Consequently, these pupils' progress and attainment are improving, and their attainment is now less than a term behind that of other pupils in the school in English and mathematics.

The quality of teaching is good

- The school has worked hard to improve teaching since the previous inspection and it is now is good with an increasing proportion that is outstanding.
- Teachers usually aim high and carefully explain to pupils how they can do better. Teachers' knowledge of individual pupils is good and used effectively to plan meaningful tasks that interest them, which pupils appreciate. One house captain told inspectors 'This school is unique, they understand you'.
- In most classes, work is carefully planned so that it offers varied, brief activities and the correct

amount of support and challenge for almost all groups of pupils. Occasionally, more-able pupils are not given demanding enough tasks to do.

- Teachers give good support to pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds as well as to disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, to make sure they are not disadvantaged in any way. Teaching assistants are well briefed. They provide frequent 'catch-up' sessions. These may be for individuals or small groups during lesson time, or at other times.
- Imaginative activities are used by most teachers to promote high-quality discussion and collaboration among pupils. For example, in an outstanding Year 5 lesson pupils were observed working very purposefully in groups on the relationship between division and factors of different numbers.
- Teachers mark work regularly and there are examples of excellent practice. However, teachers' feedback to pupils in marking is not always reinforced when teachers set targets to help pupils with the next steps for improving their writing skills.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils respond well to their teachers' high expectations of the effort and behaviour they expect to see in lessons. Relationships are very good, because teachers know their pupils well, and pupils work hard to please their teachers. Mutual respect and support between teachers and pupils help to create positive attitudes to learning throughout the school. One pupil said 'lessons are fun but challenging, definitely challenging'.
- Pupils say they feel happy and safe in school. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations such as on the internet when working with computers.
- Bullying in its many forms, including through the internet, is well understood by pupils. They are confident – and parents and carers confirm – that bullying is rare at the school. A pupil spoke for many when she said, 'there is only the tiniest bit'. Pupils are confident that, should it occur, the school handles such situations well.
- The headteacher and governors have established good systems to track attendance rates and are rising although they remain below average. They are no higher than this because of the persistent absenteeism of a small number of pupils whose families do not send them to school regularly.
- Pupils respond thoughtfully to opportunities to reflect on life's deeper issues. They are quick to help people less fortunate than themselves and show a good appreciation of the diversity of cultures in modern Britain. They are well prepared for modern society.

The leadership and management are good

- The very effective headteacher inspires staff and members of the governing body to be ambitious for the school and its pupils. They have worked together well to move the school forwards and achievement and teaching have improved. The school has the capacity to continue this improving trend.

- The headteacher keeps all aspects of the school's work under careful scrutiny. She has an exceptionally accurate awareness of its strengths and weaknesses. The performance of staff is overseen closely. They receive good quality support to make sure that their teaching promotes good progress in pupils. Teachers' salary progression is carefully monitored, and promotion is only given when the impact on pupils' achievement indicates that this is fully deserved.
- Leaders use the school's tracking systems systematically keep a close check on pupils' progress and to spot quickly any pupils at risk of underachievement. The effectiveness of these systems is seen clearly in the consistent progress of different groups, such as disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, and the narrowing of the gap between them and other pupils. Teachers and the headteacher meet regularly to discuss the progress pupils are making and to identify any who require additional help so they can catch up.
- Leaders ensure the curriculum meets pupils' needs and builds on their natural curiosity and love of learning. Creativity and essential life skills are cultivated equally well. The wide range of visits, visitors and other after-school activities not only bring learning to life, but contribute to pupils' enjoyment of school. One pupil, told about the opportunity of trying the sport of fencing, said, 'fencing is pretty cool'.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well through close involvement with the local church and community, and links with schools in other countries. Pupils participate in many community activities, and regularly join in with fund raising for local and national charities.
- The local authority has given the school good support in the last year, providing guidance on strengthening leadership and teaching in English and mathematics.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Since the last inspection, governors, well led by the chair, have kept a close check on the achievement of pupils. Governors receive comprehensive and detailed information from the headteacher on the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement and how they compare to that of other similar schools. Following training and under the direction of the headteacher, governors are adopting a systematic approach to judging how well the school is doing. For example, they attend meetings between the headteacher and teachers to discuss the progress made by pupils. They understand how funds such as the pupil premium are used to raise achievement through small-group and one-to-one tuition. They make sure targets for teachers are robust and that good staff are recruited, retained and rewarded appropriately and that any underperformance is tackled rigorously. The checks and records kept for safeguarding pupils meet requirements.

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	132105
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	402538

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	183
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Pat Christian
Headteacher	Joanna Di-Bella
Date of previous school inspection	30 June 2010
Telephone number	01707 262503
Fax number	01707 258500
Email address	admin@birchwoodavenue.herts.sch.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', 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.



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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 2013

