

Birch Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

School Hill, Birch, Colchester, CO2 0LZ

Inspection dates 28–29 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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.

- Pupils in this school love learning. This is the heart of everything they do. Their behaviour in lessons and around school and their attitudes to learning are exemplary.
- Pupils in all year groups make outstanding progress. By the end of Year 6 standards are well above national averages and have been so for a number of years.
- Teaching is outstanding, particularly in mathematics and writing. Teachers have very high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Lessons are well-planned and exciting and ensure pupils of all ages are keen to learn.
- The school has invested wisely in the use of information and communication technology to enhance learning. Pupils have frequent access to use of computers and use them confidently to apply their key skills across the curriculum.
- Levels of attendance are high. Pupils arrive promptly to school each morning, ready to learn. They frequently stay after the end of the school day to engage in further activities.
- The curriculum is highly engaging. Planned activities help pupils to develop self-confidence yet keep a sharp focus on core skills which will enable them to move on to their next stage in learning.
- Leadership at all levels is very effective. The headteacher works tirelessly to improve the school and has brought about lasting gains in teaching and achievement.
- Governors know and understand the school well. They have considerable expertise, challenge the school well and are rigorous in fulfilling their statutory duties and in ensuring all pupils are safe.
- Community spirit is high. The school makes all pupils feel welcome and valued.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is supported well. Pupils and parents spoken to during the inspection commented favourably on this aspect of education.
- The school acknowledges the need to make pupils' standards in reading as consistently strong as they are in mathematics and writing.

Information about this inspection

- 16 lessons were observed during the inspection. These included part observations of guided reading sessions and the teaching of phonics (knowledge of letters and the sounds they make). Four of these lessons were jointly observed with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, staff with special responsibilities and the special educational needs co-ordinator.
- The inspector attended a whole-school assembly, met with five members of governing body, including the Chair, a group of pupils from Key Stage 2 and a representative from the local authority. Pupils from Year 2 read to the inspector.
- Pupils were spoken to informally during break times, at lunch time and as they moved around the school at various times of the day.
- Account was taken of the 39 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), the seven submitted voluntary staff questionnaires, letters received from parents during the inspection and the views of three parents who asked to meet with the inspector.
- A range of documentation was examined, including the school's self evaluation and improvement plans, policies and procedures relating to safeguarding, school checks on the quality of teaching, minutes from governors' meetings and records of visits made by the local authority.

Inspection team

Judith O'Hare, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average sized primary school.
- The majority of pupils are from a White British heritage.
- There are five classes in total. Pupils from the Reception class to Year 5 are taught in mixed-age groups. There is a separate class for pupils in Year 6.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium funding is lower than average. (Pupil premium funding is extra money that the school receives to support those pupils who have a known entitlement to free school meals, who are from service families or who are looked after by the local authority.)
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported at school action is above the national average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of educational needs is average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which sets the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Explore the strategies being used successfully, both in the school and elsewhere, to support pupils making slower progress in reading and extend their use across the school.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Achievement across the school is outstanding. The standards pupils reach from their various starting points are above national expectations and are significantly higher than at the time of the last inspection, particularly in mathematics.
- Although children start in the Reception year with skills that are generally typical for their age, there are significant differences year on year and often they begin with skills which are less secure. Children make better than expected progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage because activities are planned carefully, hold their interest and challenge them to succeed.
- Rapid progress continues throughout Key Stages 1 and 2. Over the last four years pupils at the end of Year 2 have consistently achieved results which are markedly above average in reading, writing and mathematics. Year 1 pupils attained above average scores in each of the last two national phonics checks. In Key Stage 2 the school ensures the highest possible standards are maintained so that pupils continue to excel. Pupils leave Year 6 with results in the national tests which are either above or well above those expected. This pattern has been the case for a number of years.
- Attainment in mathematics, reading and writing is consistently high as a result of outstanding teaching although reading lags a little behind. The number of pupils who make expected and more than expected progress in all subjects is above those seen nationally. In 2013, a larger than average proportion of pupils reached Level 4 and Level 5 in all three subjects, and a much greater proportion of pupils went on to achieve Level 6 in mathematics and writing. This demonstrates the school's support for its most able pupils.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make outstanding progress and achieve significantly better than similar groups nationally. This is because of the high-quality support they receive both in lessons and in their small group work sessions.
- The small numbers of pupils eligible for the pupil premium perform as well as their classmates. There is barely any difference in their results in mathematics and reading. Typically, they are just a term behind in writing, largely as a result of having slightly weaker spelling, punctuation and grammar. Nonetheless, their achievement is high, with all pupils making outstanding progress from their starting points.
- In viewing the performance of different groups across the school, there is little evident difference except for in reading where some pupil groups achieved less well than others. This matter had already been highlighted by the school as an area for improvement.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Pupils are unanimous in their view that theirs is an outstanding school. When asked about this, one pupil explained to the inspector, 'It's because our teachers teach us how to learn so we can do things for ourselves'.
- No opportunity is missed to capitalise on learning. Classrooms are exciting, well-organised spaces and teachers use the outdoor areas very well to combine learning activities with play in the case of the youngest children, and to make learning 'real'. The school makes excellent use of a nearby woodland area as a nature trail for science. Wild flowers and birds common to the area

are signposted clearly so that pupils can watch and observe at playtime.

- Teachers plan lessons which are exciting and the topics they cover are highly engaging. Comments made such as 'my best literacy lesson yet' are not uncommon. One pupil in Year 6 asked the inspector to return to a lesson observed before playtime just to see what she had done and what she was going to do next.
- Outstanding teaching is evident in all subjects. Staff are passionate about learning. They have excellent subject knowledge and plan lessons which are pitched appropriately to ensure all pupils make maximum progress. In a very thoughtful and well-planned Year 1/2 mathematics lesson on weights and measure, for example, while some pupils predicted the weight of different objects before measuring and recording their results, others tried to account for the differences between their results and predictions they had been given and come up with explanations that 'fitted the facts'.
- Highly skilled teaching assistants support small groups and individuals well and ensure they are equally keen and motivated to learn despite any difficulties they might have. Shared planning with teachers ensures their support is appropriately focused and no learning time in class is lost.
- Questioning is used effectively to prompt pupils to think things through for themselves and to reach their own conclusions. This is also evident in the marking of pupils' work where pupils are frequently asked to identify, explain and then correct errors they have made.
- Very good use is made of information and communication technology to enhance learning. This is particularly evident in the teaching of mathematics. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage were observed using a games programme to help them sequence numbers correctly from 1 – 20. In Year 6, pupils used an on-line programme to generate and then solve number problems accurately and at speed. This fun but sophisticated approach to learning is helping children from a very early age to use and apply key mathematics skills and to make rapid progress.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils at this school have very positive attitudes to learning and their behaviour is exemplary. They engage fully in all aspects of school life and work together as a team to ensure everyone achieves maximum success.
- These consistently positive attitudes to learning are a significant reason why pupils make such good progress in lessons. As one pupil spoken to explained, 'If you don't try you will never learn.'
- Pupils take great pride in the presentation of their work. This was evident in their class books and in their work on public display. Pupils keep a class learning log, including photographic evidence, of everything they do. These 'big books' are used to tell the story of what they have learned and to chart their success and progress. Pupils were keen to show these books to the inspector. They explained how every pupil's work is represented.
- At all times pupils are polite and courteous. They readily take on roles and responsibilities within the school. The opportunities for them to do this are wide and various and include fund raising and local community projects.
- Older children act as playground buddies and are quick to spot if anyone needs help. Pupils in

Year 6 work as reading mentors helping younger children to develop their skills. Other pupils responsibly lead discussion sessions during whole-school assemblies.

- Pupils overwhelmingly agree they are, at all times, safe in school. They say there is no poor behaviour and no bullying, just a few occasions where some pupils 'fall out' with friends. They are confident there is always an adult on hand should problems occur.
- Pupils are very aware of the need for personal safety. They understand the importance of being polite and respectful at all times. They speak knowledgeably about e-safety and applaud the school's 'no mobile phones in school' policy.
- Attendance, below average at the time of the last inspection, has improved significantly and is now broadly average. Punctuality is good. Procedures to follow up any non-attendance are rigorous and transparent. Leaders have set high targets to improve attendance even further and to discourage holidays being taken during term time.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher is a champion of learning. She is highly ambitious for her school and leads by example. She gives up her time to run additional 'catch up' classes and works tirelessly to ensure all pupils achieve their very best. She has a very clear view of the school's current performance and, together with her staff, has used this knowledge to establish effective plans for further improvement.
- Teachers feel valued and supported. They support and guide each other through shared lesson planning, lesson observations and feedback. Astute delegation of roles and responsibilities across the school ensures that all staff have an equal say and influence on change. Teachers with management responsibilities are well-supported and lead their areas effectively.
- The curriculum is very well planned and encourages pupils to apply and extend their learning at every opportunity. One reason for the school's success is the focus placed on the use and application of core skills in real life situations. This approach enables pupils to understand the importance of learning. An example of this was seen in the Year 4/5 class. Following a trip to a local museum, pupils set up and then hosted their own in-school museum. Writing skills were developed through the production of advertising materials, numeracy skills through the costing and timings of the day's events.
- Leaders keep rigorous checks on pupils' progress. Where gaps appear, or when any pupils are at risk of falling behind, high-quality additional support is put immediately into place.
- The management of teachers' performance and their progression through the salary scales is linked very closely to pupils' progress.
- Pupil premium funding is used effectively to support all eligible pupils. The school has purchased additional support time from specialists and teaching assistants, as well as extra learning resources pitched to match the needs of pupils at risk of falling behind. This has enabled these pupils to achieve similar standards to their peers across the school.
- The school has devised careful plans to maximise the effectiveness of the new funding for primary sport. This is being used to build on plans which were already in place. The additional funding now supports swimming lessons for all pupils and specialist coaching for staff to develop their skills. The school has purchased the services of a specialist coach and the programme is

underway.

- The local authority recognises the strength of the school leadership team as well as the high standards pupils achieve. As such it provides only 'light touch' support to the school. Because of their high regard for the work of the headteacher, she is used to support other local schools.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body is a highly qualified group of professionals. They have a wealth of local knowledge as well as personal experience of teaching. They are extremely committed to ensuring that all pupils, as well as the local community, benefit from partnership working. Governors know and fully understand the journey the school is taking. They regularly engage in school activities which include joint lesson observations. Governors have had extensive training in data analysis. They fully understand how the school performs and how pupil outcomes compare to schools nationally. Governors set challenging targets for the headteacher and regularly assess those targets set for the performance of all other staff at the school. Their systems for managing school finances, the safe recruiting of staff, ensuring appropriate procedures for health and safety and safeguarding are sound and meet requirements fully. Governors' diligent management of funds available has enabled the school to invest in additional resources such as computers, to refurbish classrooms, to enhance the outdoor areas and to subsidise extra-curricular activities for pupils such as school visits and trips. The governing body knows how the pupil premium funding has been spent and the difference this has made to pupils' performance. They are equally aware of how and why the new additional primary sports funding is being used.

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	115138
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	425368

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	140
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue Gee
Headteacher	Reverend Kate Moore
Date of previous school inspection	3 December 2008
Telephone number	01206 330224
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