

Birchwood CofE Primary School

The Mount, Admirals Road, Birchwood, WA3 6QG

Inspection dates 15–16 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
Achievement of pupils		Inadequate	4
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that has serious weaknesses.

- For the last three years attainment at the end of both Key Stages 1 and 2 has been significantly below the national average.
- Achievement is inadequate because most pupils, especially girls, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, do not make enough progress in Years 1 to 6.
- Too few pupils attain higher levels in national tests at the end of Key Stage 1 and 2.
- Teaching requires improvement because expectations of what pupils can achieve are not high enough to ensure that all pupils progress well and enjoy learning.
- Too few pupils improve their literacy and numeracy skills by practising them in other subjects.
- Too few pupils apply their mathematical skills to solve practical problems.
- The management of pupils' behaviour is inconsistent. Some pupils lose concentration and behave inappropriately when the pace of learning slows and activities do not challenge or interest them.
- Until recently, senior leaders, managers and governors have not done enough to eradicate inadequate teaching and support weaker teachers.
- Subject and key stage leaders do not have sufficient skills to check the quality of teaching and pupils' progress.

The school has the following strengths

- Senior leaders, including governors, are taking decisive action to improve teaching and achievement.
- Standards are beginning to improve, particularly in reading.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress.
- Leaders and governors have a well-developed understanding of what the school needs to do to improve and have eradicated inadequate teaching.
- Attendance has improved and pupils say that they feel safe and enjoy coming to school. The school's relationship with parents, the church and the community is improving.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 15 lessons, including parts of lessons, as well as the teaching of small groups of pupils and sessions aimed at helping pupils to learn to read through understanding the links between letters and the sounds they make (phonics teaching). Three lessons were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read from Years 2, 3, 4, and 5, and held discussions with pupils from across the school. Pupils' work in books was scrutinised during lessons and separately with the school's senior leadership team.
- Inspectors took account of 10 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) as well as the school's own surveys of parents' views and held informal discussions with parents at the start of the school day.
- A telephone discussion was held with a representative from the local authority school improvement service. A meeting was held with a specialist leader of education from Oakwood Community Primary School and a national leader of education from Great Crosby Catholic Primary School.
- A meeting was held with nine governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body and vice-chair.
- Various school documents were examined. These included: records of pupils' attendance, behaviour records and safeguarding documentation; data on pupils' progress; external evaluations of the school; records of the school's checks on the quality of teaching; minutes of the governing body's meetings; the school's development plan and review of its own performance.

Inspection team

Lenford White, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Maureen Hints

Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 44 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended), Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is almost double the national average.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is triple the national average.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives additional funding through the pupil premium is more than double the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those children that are looked after by the local authority.
- The school has a small proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups. A few pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The school does not meet the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- For the last year the school has worked with a specialist leader of education supporting staff in using data more effectively and on improving the quality of pupils' writing. A national leader of education has supported the senior leadership team with development planning and improving systems for safeguarding.
- Since the school's last inspection there have been a number of changes to staffing and the governing body. Almost all governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, have been appointed within the last 18 months, and a number of new staff have been appointed. These include a deputy headteacher, two newly qualified teachers and a pastoral officer. The school's permanent headteacher is unavoidably absent. Her post is currently being covered by an acting headteacher. For two days per week, additional senior leadership support is provided through the local authority. Current arrangements will be in place at least until the end of the academic year.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure teaching is consistently good or better so that all groups of pupils make at least good progress and their attainment rises in reading, writing and mathematics at Key Stage 1 and 2, by:
 - ensuring all teaching is well-paced and captures pupils' interests and encourages them to learn, particularly the most able
 - ensuring marking improves, and best practice is shared and consistent across all subjects, especially in science and history
 - developing pupils' ability to assess the quality of their own work and to be aware what they need to do in order to take the next steps in their learning.
- Raise the achievement of all pupils in Years 1 to 6, in reading, writing and mathematics so that more attain higher standards at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 by:

- ensuring that there are no significant differences between the performance of pupils from different groups, including boys and girls and that lessons are of interest to both
- ensuring that pupils have more opportunities to read, write and use mathematical skills in other subjects
- providing pupils with a variety of opportunities to use and apply their mathematical skills to solve practical, day-to-day problems.

■ Improve the impact of leadership, management and governance by:

- ensuring that governors and the senior leadership team continually evaluate the effectiveness of the school's main action plan
- developing the expertise of subject and key stage leaders in checking the quality of teaching and pupils' progress
- ensuring that all adults consistently apply school policies and are insistent that pupils demonstrate the highest possible standards of behaviour, particularly in the classroom.

An external review of governance should be undertaken, to include a specific focus on the school's use of the pupil premium, in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is inadequate

- Despite slight year-on-year improvements over the last three years, standards at the end of Year 2 in 2013 were significantly below average in reading, writing and mathematics, as was pupils' progress and attainment in all subjects by the end of Year 6. This shows that pupils' made inadequate progress from their starting points in Year 1 during this time and hence that their achievement was inadequate.
- Over the last year, the school has put into place strategies which are beginning to improve standards. These include better monitoring of pupils' performance, improving the quality of teaching and providing timely targeted support for pupils through one-to-one teaching and working in small groups. However, despite these improvements, pupils in Years 1 to 6 still do not make enough progress overall.
- Very few pupils reached the higher levels of attainment in national tests at the end of Years 2 and 6 in recent years. However, better teaching, for example in Year 6 this academic year, is helping to ensure that more pupils are on track to do so.
- Small-group teaching activities and challenging tasks during lessons are helping the most able pupils to make better progress. However, their achievement over time remains inadequate because the work they are given does not always stretch them to achieve their best.
- Teaching in small groups has helped pupils supported through the pupil premium attain higher standards in reading than their classmates and higher than similar groups of pupils nationally. However, by the end of Year 6 in 2013, the gap between the performance in writing and mathematics of this group of pupils and their peers in school was almost two terms. Despite improvements to achievement in reading, overall their progress remains inadequate.
- Equality of opportunity is improving this academic year, particularly for girls, whose performance at the end of Key Stage 1 and 2 in 2013 was below that of boys. The school's current data show that most groups of pupils are now making better progress across most year groups but their inadequate achievement overall means that the school is not yet achieving sufficient success in promoting equality of opportunity for its pupils.
- The overall attainment of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs in 2013 was below average at the end of Year 6. However, this is improving due to effective one-to-one teaching activities delivered by well-trained teachers and teaching assistants.
- The performance of the few pupils from ethnic minority groups, and the few who speak English as an additional language at the end of Year 6 in 2013 varied from above to below the national average. The school's current data show that these pupils are now on track to meet challenging targets.
- Phonics teaching has improved. Those pupils who read to inspectors said they loved reading and read regularly at home. Many were able to talk confidently about authors and genres. Less able readers in Years 2 and 3 used their phonic skills well to sound out and read unfamiliar words.
- Standards achieved by pupils in mathematics have been well below average for the last three years. However, during the inspection pupils made good progress in a number of mathematics lessons. Pupils indicated that teachers make lessons far more interesting than in the past. The school's tracking information indicates improved progress across a number of year groups, including Years 2 and 6.
- Children start in the Nursery with skills and abilities which are well below those expected for their age. A stimulating and caring environment, managed by effective teachers and other adults, ensure that children progress well through the Early Years Foundation Stage, though only about one third achieve a good level of development by the time they enter Year 1.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Although teaching is improving it is still judged to require improvement overall because it does

not enable pupils in Years 1 to 6 to make good progress..

- Information about what pupils already know, understand and can do is not always used effectively when teachers plan lessons. This means that pupils, particularly the most able, are not always fully challenged to do as well as they should.
- While an increasing number of pupils, particularly in Key Stage 2, know their learning targets in English and mathematics, their ability to assess the quality of their own work is not yet developed enough nor is their understanding of how to improve their learning.
- Marking is improving, especially in Years 4, 5 and 6 where there are clear examples of pupils correcting and improving their work as a result of teachers' comments and advice. However, this is less evident in other year groups and marking in science and history, for example, is less informative than it is in English and mathematics.
- Where teaching is having an effective impact on pupils' learning, activities interest pupils and make them want to learn. This was the case in a Year 6 English lesson where pupils were tasked with identifying 'interesting aspects' of a short text describing a beach. Pupils' resulting work demonstrated that not only were they able to skilfully perform this task but that they were also able to write their own even better descriptions.
- This effective impact of teaching on pupils' learning in literacy and numeracy is most strongly evident where they are engaged in well-planned tasks that stretch their learning. This was the case in a Year 2 mathematics lesson where pupils explained very ably how to use number grids to both add and subtract. At the same time, two very capable teaching assistants supported and challenged two groups of pupils of different abilities to tackle increasingly difficult sums.
- Pupils are often excited about learning new things and are eager to share their work with visitors. This was evident in a number of classes when pupils, without prompting, read through and talked about their work with inspectors.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are provided with ample opportunities to explore the world around them and decide what they want to learn. They cooperate with each other, settle down quickly and behave well. However, such exploration is less evident in older year groups where too few opportunities are provided for pupils to find things out for themselves.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement because not all adults consistently apply the school's behaviour policy. They do not always insist that pupils demonstrate the highest possible standards of behaviour in the classroom.
- Occasionally, pupils engage in behaviour which is not conducive to good learning, including, shouting out answers and not listening carefully enough to teachers' instructions.
- The school's newly appointed pastoral officer's strategies to track pupils' behaviour, to work with families and to provide support to staff is already beginning to improve behaviour.
- The majority of pupils are helpful and courteous. Most enjoy coming to school and relish the opportunity of learning new things. This is evidenced by their improved attendance, and the awards that they receive during celebration assemblies for good attendance and achievement.
- Classrooms are tidy and well-kept with pupils' work on display throughout the school. Pupils are neatly presented and wear their school uniform with pride. Pupils behave well during lunchtimes, which are well organised and supervised.
- Most parents indicate that they are happy with pupils' behaviour at school. They are of the opinion that bullying is rare. Those pupils who talked to inspectors were adamant that bullying almost never happens, and that when it does that it is dealt with immediately.
- Pupils have a well developed understanding of most forms of prejudice-based bullying. With regard to race for example, all pupils are familiar with the book 'The Whisperer' which focuses on differences and similarities. Through discussions pupils revealed that studying this book, as part of anti-bullying week, has helped them to understand prejudice and discrimination.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils say that they feel very safe at

school and that they are very confident in approaching adults with any concerns.

- Visitors, including fire fighters, police officers and representatives from ChildLine, regularly address the whole school during assemblies and help pupils to understand dangers, and how to avoid them.
- Pupils have a well-developed understanding of how to stay safe while using the internet. Older pupils, for example know that personal details should never be given out to strangers and that under no circumstances should 'random people' be added as friends.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Although the school's new leadership team, with the full backing of the governing body, has acted decisively and brought about recent improvements, leadership and management still requires improvement because pupils' achievement overtime is inadequate and teaching is not yet good enough to ensure that all pupils progress well.
- Teachers are now fully held to account for the performance of pupils, inadequate teaching has been eradicated and pupils' progress is more closely monitored. However, these changes are recent and their impact on tackling the school's legacy of inadequate achievement is yet to be fully realised.
- Senior leaders have devised with staff a whole-school action plan aimed at ensuring improvements in a number of areas including, raising levels of achievement and improving the quality of teaching. However, the full impact of this plan is yet to be fully realised.
- While the role of middle leaders, including those with subject and key stage responsibilities, is evolving, their expertise in checking the quality of teaching and pupils' progress is underdeveloped and pupils' achievement, until recently, has only gradually improved.
- Some subjects, including science and history, do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to develop their language and communication skills. While the teaching of mathematics is improving, too few opportunities are available for pupils to apply their skills in this subject to real-life problem-solving activities.
- The school's promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is improving. It is currently exploring ways to broaden pupils' cultural understanding through, for example, devising a programme of visits and visitors.
- School leaders, including governors, ensure that teachers' progression through the pay scale is closely linked to challenging targets. The school's current performance management system clearly defines what these targets are for each teacher and when they should be reached.
- The school has benefited from a wide range of support over the last 18 months, most of which has been either provided by, or brokered through, the local authority. This has included a review of governance and the secondment of a very experienced senior advisor, initially as acting head teacher, at the beginning of this academic year. All of which have helped the school to improve standards this year.
- A national leader of education and a specialist leader of education have supported the acting headteacher, mentored the deputy headteacher and supported senior leaders in checking the quality of teaching. As a result, the school's leadership is now developing the culture needed to improve teaching.
- Although the school has received significant support of late, its ability to build on the improvements resulting from this support is strong. Staff are appreciative of their many training opportunities which they say has helped to improve their teaching practice.
- Safeguarding procedures are followed closely and meet requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body has considerable strengths. Governors are committed, knowledgeable, very experienced and unified in their ambitions to drive the school forward.
 - Governors are fully aware of the challenges they face and have taken decisive action in order to eradicate inadequate teaching. They ensure that no teachers are awarded pay increases or

secure promotion until they achieve stretching targets linked to pupils' achievement.

Governors know that the quality of teaching is improving because they regularly talk to pupils about their learning and are actively involved in the life of the school. Recent improvements in reading and pupils' love of books are, in part, due to governors' fund raising for the school's newly invigorated and freshly-stocked library.

- Governors ensure that their training is up-to-date and keep abreast of new developments in education. They know that small-group teaching activities and one-to-one support is helping to ensure that those pupils supported through the pupil premium are now achieving better. They are further developing their role to ensure that achievement gaps between these pupils and their peers in writing and mathematics are closing.
- Governors ensure that the school's physical education and sports grant is put to good use. It is used in a variety of ways and has increased pupils' participation in sports such as karate, dance and tennis, and improved teachers' skills in teaching physical education.
- Governors have a good grasp of data on pupils' performance. They know how the school has performed over the last three years and understand the current progress being made by pupils across each year group.

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	111304
Local authority	Warrington
Inspection number	431000

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	205
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Littlewood
Headteacher	Dawn Rapson
Date of previous school inspection	21 June 2012
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