

Birch Wood (Melton Area Special School)

Grange Drive, Melton Mowbray, LE13 1HA

Inspection dates 10–11 December 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Early years provision		Good	2
Sixth form provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Following a period of changes in headship, strong direction from the acting headteacher and inspired leadership of the new headteacher have enabled the school to rapidly improve over the past year.
- Leaders and governors are making sure that teaching and achievement are continuing to improve.
- Leaders ensure that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well.
- The school's efforts to keep pupils safe are good. All policies and procedures have been reviewed and strengthened, helped by strong links with parents.
- Pupils' behaviour is good and they have good attitudes to learning.
- Teachers make good use of probing questions and well-chosen resources to stimulate pupils' learning.
- Teaching assistants provide good support for learning. They work well together with teachers to promote pupils' communication skills.
- Pupils make good progress in communication, reading, writing and mathematics. Older pupils and students in the sixth form make good progress on their examination courses.
- Children in the early years settle in quickly and make good progress as a result of good leadership and good teaching.
- The sixth form is good. Leaders make sure that teaching is good and students are well prepared for the next stage of their lives.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- A few remaining weaknesses in teaching hold back pupils' achievement.
- Pupils do not always know how well they are doing or how to extend their thinking.
- Occasionally a few pupils find their work too difficult or too easy.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 15 lessons with senior leaders to look at the impact of teaching on pupils' learning. They saw nearly all teachers teach.
- Inspectors looked at samples of pupils' work from across the school, including the early years and the sixth form. They also heard a few pupils read.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, subject leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body, a local authority representative, and the leader of the Forest Way Teaching School Alliance. Meetings took place with two different groups of pupils. Informal discussions were also held with other pupils and students in the sixth form at break time and lunchtime.
- Inspectors looked at 19 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and 38 responses to the school's most recent survey of parental views. They also considered 60 questionnaires returned by staff.

Inspection team

Declan McCarthy, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Mark Redmile

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Birch Wood is a split site area special school serving mainly north-east Leicestershire and providing education for pupils with moderate, severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties. Site one provides for pupils from early years to Year 14 with complex special educational needs and site two provides for pupils with moderate learning difficulties.
- Approximately 60% of the pupils have complex special educational needs including autistic spectrum disorder, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, physical disabilities, speech, language and communication needs or sensory impairments.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education health and care plan.
- Most pupils are White British. There are twice as many boys than girls.
- An average proportion (34%) of pupils are known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which is additional government funding for those known to be eligible for free school meals or in local authority care.
- The very few children in the early years attend full time.
- Some students in the sixth form attend either Brooksby College or Melton Learning Hub for half a day per week, as part of their education, to follow work-related courses.
- Inspectors were aware during the inspection that a serious incident which occurred at the setting since the previous inspection is under investigation by the appropriate authorities. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate incidents of this kind, actions taken by the setting in response to the incident were considered alongside the other evidence available at the time of the inspection to inform inspectors' judgements.
- There have been two changes of headteacher since the previous inspection. The deputy headteacher was appointed acting headteacher in February 2014 and a new headteacher was appointed in August 2014. A new Chair of the Governing Body took up post in September 2014.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and raise achievement by:
 - showing pupils clearly how well they are doing and how to extend their thinking
 - giving pupils tasks at consistently the right level of difficulty for their ability – neither too hard nor too easy.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, with strong support from other senior leaders and good support from subject leaders and governors, is providing inspired leadership and direction. Together they have created an ethos across the school where teaching, pupils' behaviour and their impact on learning flourish. This has ensured that the school is improving in all aspects of its work.
- Leaders have introduced robust procedures to check the suitability of staff and visitors to work with pupils. Training in safeguarding is now fully up to date and they have recently carried out a rigorous review of all safeguarding procedures to further enhance the safety and well-being of pupils.
- Leaders' accurate views of the school's strengths and weaknesses are based on thorough monitoring of all aspects of its work, and are used to establish well-chosen priorities for improvement. Subject leaders continuously review the impact of their work and teaching within their areas in improving pupils' learning. Good leadership of the early years helps children to make good progress in all areas of learning. Similarly, good leadership of the sixth form ensures that students are well prepared for the next stage of their lives.
- Senior leaders and subject leaders regularly check pupils' learning through progress meetings, lesson observations and reviewing pupils' books. Procedures for managing the performance of teachers have recently been strengthened with a focus on the progress different pupils should be making against their challenging targets, and are now directly linked to the national *Teachers' Standards*. Strengths and any areas for development are identified, individual staff targets are agreed and suitable training is chosen.
- The curriculum is developing well and is continuously adapted to ensure it is relevant to the needs of different pupils. On site one, pupils with more complex needs follow a primary-based curriculum model where they are taught by just one teacher for all subjects. On site two, pupils with moderate learning difficulties follow a subject-based curriculum leading to examination courses. There is a strong emphasis of developing the basic skills of communication, literacy and numeracy across both sites.
- Older pupils and students have good opportunities to prepare for a wide range of examination courses, including GCSE examinations, which have increased significantly since the last inspection. Good careers guidance enables them to make informed choices about their future pathways.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through activities such as Mexican week, where they learned about Mexican culture and food, the French café, world cup football events, arts and the culture group. They have many opportunities to reflect and sometimes experience a sense of awe and wonder in their sensory experiences. Good personal, social and health education develops pupils' skills well through topics on smoking, alcohol and drug abuse, sex and relationships education and the rule of law. They learn about democracy and are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- New arrangements for assessment are developing well. All pupils are on course to transfer to education, health and care plans within agreed timescales. All pupils' skills are assessed on entry to the school to produce an individual student information (ISI) file. This includes individual education plans, individual behaviour plans, a parent school agreement, a summary of medical needs, a review of progress and attainment and a communication passport. The ISI is updated regularly with a formal review each term.
- Strong links with local schools and colleges and good partnerships within the community and outside professional agencies enhance pupils' learning and well-being. The progress, behaviour and attendance of sixth form students on part-time placements with other providers are carefully monitored and checked.
- Leaders make sure that all pupils have equal opportunities to participate in all school activities. This is reflected in the equally good progress different groups of pupils are making. Discrimination of any kind is tackled well, and this is reflected in the good relationships different pupils have with each other.

- Good use is made of pupil premium funding to provide additional support for literacy and numeracy, so disadvantaged pupils make the same progress as their classmates. It is also used to fund the purchase of school trips to enable eligible pupils to participate fully in school activities. Year 7 'catch-up' funding is also used well to provide extra support for literacy and numeracy.
- Leaders make good use of primary school sports funding to increase the range of lunchtime and after-school sports clubs, to provide specialist coaching through a trained sport development assistant, and to fund additional sporting events such as the 'Birch Wood World Cup' day. This has led to pupils' increased participation in sports and improvements in physical fitness.
- The local authority, working closely with the Forest Way Teaching School Alliance, is providing good support and challenge for the school. For example, regular visits and reviews and the development of a robust plan to significantly reduce the budget deficit have resulted in the effective reorganisation of the staffing structure to substantially reduce staffing costs.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have an accurate view of the effectiveness of their own work, and are using this well to strengthen their role. They have overseen the restructuring of management so that the school is on track to have a budget surplus within three years.
 - The governors maintain a realistic view of teaching through regular visits to the school, and know how well different groups of pupils are progressing through their analysis of data. They use this to influence whole-school priorities for development. They ensure that the performance of the headteacher and teachers is managed well, and support her well in rewarding good teaching and tackling any underperformance. They challenge spending, for example of the pupil premium, to ensure value for money.
 - Governors have good oversight of how well the school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, including the promotion of British values.
 - They ensure that the legal requirements for safeguarding are met and procedures are effective.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils say it is good, and this was also confirmed by nearly all parents and staff in their questionnaires. Behaviour around the school and in lessons is typically good in all age groups from the early years to the sixth form. Pupils respond well to the consistent management of behaviour by staff, who use the system of rewards and sanctions well to promote good behaviour.
- The few pupils who can demonstrate extremely challenging behaviour make rapid progress in self-control. This is reflected in the small number of recorded incidents of disruption, which decline over time.
- Pupils' good attitudes to learning and their good behaviour in lessons support their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They try hard to complete their tasks, focus on learning, listen carefully to others, follow instructions and take a great pride in their work.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Staff follow effective procedures to monitor and promote good attendance and punctuality, including an immediate telephone call home should a pupil be absent, with follow-up home visits if necessary. Any absence is typically due to hospitalisation or the need for additional off-site therapies.
- The school thoroughly assesses potential risks to students who attend alternative placements as part of their education. Equally detailed risks assessments cover visits and trips, and all activities in school.
- Incidents of bullying are rare. Pupils have a developing awareness of different types of bullying including cyber bullying and name-calling. Pupils and parents say that if it should occur, bullying is always dealt with

effectively.

- Pupils develop well their awareness of how to stay safe, such as the dangers of smoking and the harmful effects of drugs. Older pupils learn how to travel safely and independently. Pupils use computers and practical equipment such as tools safely, and play safely at break times and lunchtime.

The quality of teaching is good

- Records from the monitoring of teaching, work in pupils' books and information about the progress different pupils are making confirm that the impact of teaching on pupils' learning is good. Pupils nearly always try their best in lessons and have positive attitudes to learning, which enables them to make good progress.
- Teachers asked questions skilfully to probe and extend pupils' learning in nearly all lessons visited. In a writing activity the teacher used questions and discussion well to extend pupils' writing about their personal interests. In a mathematics lesson, pupils sustained high levels of concentration as they worked on symmetry and the teacher constantly challenged the thinking of all groups of pupils with searching questions.
- Staff make good use of well-chosen resources to stimulate learning, including pictures and real-life objects. In the lessons seen, staff made good use of electronic switches to enable those with more complex needs to focus on learning.
- Teaching assistants support pupils with more complex needs and disadvantaged pupils well, by breaking tasks down into smaller achievable steps and clarifying any misunderstandings.
- In the early years, the teacher and teaching assistants work very closely together to ensure each child makes consistently good progress in each area of learning. In the sixth form, teachers set high expectations for students' learning. In a writing lesson, students who have complex needs were encouraged by all the staff to identify and make a list of those who should be invited to attend the opening of their new café in January.
- All staff work together well as a team to promote pupils' communication skills effectively through signing, the use of symbols, visual timetables and encouraging questions. The basic skills of literacy and numeracy are also taught well. For example, teachers make good use of phonics (the sounds letters make) to promote reading and spelling. In their books pupils are often made aware of how well they are using punctuation and spelling when writing in subjects other than English.
- Teaching is not yet outstanding because of a few remaining weaknesses relating to expectations and guidance. In a writing lesson, pupils made limited progress because they were unsure about how well they were doing or how to improve their writing. Samples of pupils' written work also showed that pupils who were able to complete all tasks accurately were not shown how to further extend their thinking.
- Occasionally a few pupils find their work too difficult or too easy. In discussions, a very small number of pupils said that sometimes their work is too easy. This was also evident in books. Just occasionally the least able pupils had been given the same tasks as the most able and could not complete them all, whereas the most able pupils completed all aspects of the written tasks easily. In a science lesson, pupils with a wide range of abilities were all given the same task. The least able found it too difficult and the most able were able to complete it with relative ease.

The achievement of pupils is good

- The complex nature of their learning difficulties means that pupils' attainment on entry to the school is low, and it remains low in comparison with age-related expectations. However, pupils of all abilities make good progress, and this is reflected in the views of pupils and their parents.

- Children in the early years make good progress in each area of learning. All staff work closely together to create a warm atmosphere and to stimulate each child's learning.
- The school's accurate data and the work in pupils' books show that during their time in school, all pupils, including the few who speak English as an additional language, make good progress in communication, reading, writing and mathematics. All pupils are provided with challenging targets for learning in each of these areas and make good progress towards them. There are no significant differences in progress between boys and girls, or between those with additional complex special educational needs and their classmates.
- Pupils with moderate learning difficulties make good progress. By the end of Year 11 they gain a wide range of relevant academic and work-related qualifications including English and mathematics. This prepares them well for the sixth form or further education.
- Pupils with additional complex special educational needs, such as autistic spectrum disorders, make good progress. Teachers and teaching assistants make good use of communication aids to stimulate their learning.
- The few most able pupils make equally good progress because teachers plan individual extension activities to develop their thinking further. The oldest pupils in this group were entered for GCSE courses, including mathematics and English, for the first time this year.
- Older pupils and students in the sixth form make good progress on their accredited courses and in developing their independence skills. School data show that sixth form students make good progress on their part-time work-related college courses. All older pupils and students move on to their chosen courses in the sixth form or further education, and complete these studies.
- All pupils in Year 7 are on track to meet or exceed their challenging targets in literacy and numeracy as a result of good use of additional Year 7 'catch-up' funding.

The early years provision

is good

- The achievement of the few children of Reception age is consistently good. The school's 'learning journeys' and assessment records show that these children make good progress in all areas of learning, particularly in communication and in personal social and emotional development. This enables them to settle into their routines quickly.
- Good leadership has created a highly stimulating environment where all learning activities are well organised. Leaders make sure that all staff have a detailed knowledge of what each child knows and can do, and use this information well to enrich and challenge the learning of each child. They use symbols, signing and real-life objects to develop children's communication and social interaction skills well.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work as closely as they can with parents, for example through 'Stay and Play' sessions, to ensure that children settle in quickly and make good progress. Learning tasks are matched to children's interests, and this stimulates their learning. Children were seen making rapid progress in counting and naming colours with sustained concentration using different practical resources and activities.
- Good leadership and good teaching ensure that all learning and welfare requirements are met to promote children's safety and well-being. Good use of praise and encouragement develops children's self-esteem and confidence. Their good behaviour and enjoyment of learning make a good contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The sixth form provision

is good

- The head of sixth form, with strong support from senior leaders, has developed teaching and learning

since the last inspection. Students in both sites now share a sixth form centre, which includes the 'Sweet Sixteen' café, an independent learning zone and library, a life skills home-from-home kitchen, a quiet area for reflection and a common area with before and after-school clubs. Students' enterprise and independence skills are promoted well in the combined sweet shop and café. This is managed and accessed by sixth form students as their enterprise project.

- Good teaching is making a strong contribution to students' good learning and progress. Teachers show high expectations and match students' programmes of study carefully to their abilities and interests. The range of academic and work-related courses, which now includes GCSEs in English, mathematics, science and art, helps to prepare students well for the next stage of their lives.
- The sixth form leader promotes students' safety and well-being effectively by ensuring that thorough risk assessments are carried out when students attend college and by closely monitoring their behaviour and attendance while at college. Students' behaviour is good and they show respect and courtesy to others.
- Retention rates are high in the sixth form and students benefit from good careers advice to enable them to make informed choices about their future lives. As a result, when they leave school all students transfer to colleges of further education.

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	134640
Local authority	Leicestershire
Inspection number	448935

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	141
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	36
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dorothy Holland
Headteacher	Nina Watts
Date of previous school inspection	20–21 September 2011
Telephone number	01664 483340
Fax number	01664 483349
Email address	office@birchwood.leics.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 and 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 2014

