

Birchanger Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Birchwood, Birchanger, Bishop's Stortford, CM23 5QL

Inspection dates 11–12 February 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Early years provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Too few pupils have, in the last two years, made good progress in Key Stage 2. Consequently, standards have not been high enough in Year 6, especially in mathematics.
- Pupils in Years 3 and 4 did not make enough progress in the autumn term, although it has begun to accelerate recently.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils is inconsistent across the school. The gaps between their attainment and that of their peers, both in school and nationally, are not closing rapidly enough.
- Teachers have not had consistently high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Work has not provided sufficient challenge for the full range of pupils.
- The capacity of school leadership is constrained because the responsibilities of key subject leaders are underdeveloped. These leaders have not had sufficient involvement in ensuring that pupils achieve well.

The school has the following strengths

- The teaching of phonics (the sounds letters make) has improved. This is contributing to better progress in reading.
- Children in the early years and pupils in Years 1 and 2 achieve well because teaching has been more consistently good in these age groups.
- Progress in Years 3 to 6 is now improving, with more stable staffing. Standards are rising, including those in Year 6.
- Pupils show positive attitudes to learning, feel very safe and behave well.
- The appointment of the current headteacher has brought much-needed stability and strategic direction to the school.
- The governors have provided vital continuity during a period of rapid change. They are well informed about pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching, and are active in challenging school leaders to accelerate improvement.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed learning in six lessons, five of which were seen jointly with the headteacher.
- The inspector looked closely at pupils' written work for the current school year. He listened to some pupils reading.
- Meetings were held with a group of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors, the school's senior and subject leaders, and a parent. The inspector held a meeting with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector took account of the 15 responses to a staff questionnaire, the 36 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and the school's own survey of parents, carried out in 2015.
- The inspector observed the school's work and looked at a range of school documents, including plans for improvement and records of the school's checks on the quality of teaching. He also considered notes of visits from the local authority, minutes of meetings and evaluations by the school's independent educational adviser and minutes of governing body meetings. He scrutinised records relating to behaviour, attendance, safeguarding and the systems used to check pupils' progress.

Inspection team

George Logan, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Birchanger Church of England Primary School is much smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- Almost all pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is below the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported through the pupil premium is well below the national average. This additional funding supports pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals or looked after by the local authority. There were too few disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 in 2014 to comment on their attainment without risk of identifying individuals.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- There are five classes. In the Reception class all children attend full time. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 are taught in separate classes. The other two classes include pupils from two year groups, Years 3 and 4, and Years 5 and 6.
- The school shares a site with an independent nursery school. This is managed and inspected separately.
- The school has experienced changes in leadership and teaching staff since the last inspection. The current headteacher joined the school in September 2014. There had been three acting headteachers in the previous four terms. Three of the five teaching staff have joined the school since the last inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that it is at least good across the school, by:
 - ensuring that all teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - setting consistently challenging work for all groups of pupils, including those identified as disadvantaged.
- Build on pupils' improving progress and raise standards, particularly in mathematics, by:
 - rigorously evaluating the impact of all additional support and guidance for disadvantaged pupils, to ensure that they make consistently rapid progress across the school
 - sustaining the recent acceleration in learning in Years 3 and 4, so that gaps in learning are quickly identified and tackled.
- Improve the effectiveness of leaders and governors by:
 - defining the responsibilities of subject leaders more clearly so that they have a greater impact upon school improvement.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Since the last inspection, some discontinuity in senior leadership has slowed the pace of improvement. The new headteacher has brought new energy to the school and has already had a significant impact. Even so, the capacity of senior leadership to drive improvement remains constrained. Key subject leaders are active, knowledgeable and enthusiastic, but have not had a sufficiently defined role in, or accountability for, driving school improvement. Consequently, their impact has been limited.
- The deployment of funding to support the progress of disadvantaged pupils has not been effective enough. The school has begun to monitor the use of this funding more closely to identify which initiatives are enabling these pupils to make better progress.
- The school has reviewed the way subjects are taught to reflect changes to the National Curriculum. The current plan ensures that pupils experience the full range of expected subjects. The school is working with other schools locally to identify and implement an appropriate, shared system for measuring pupils' progress and attainment.
- The recently appointed headteacher has made an excellent start. The school is stable and pupils' achievement is improving. All adults are committed to improving pupils' opportunities, so that they are well prepared for later education. Leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and the improvement plan includes appropriate priorities.
- The leadership of teaching is effective; consequently, pupils now experience better teaching, which challenges them to learn rapidly. Leaders have tackled weaker teaching promptly, so that pupils' progress has begun to accelerate in the current term. Their evaluations of teaching and learning are accurate. The management of teachers' performance, recently re-established, is increasingly effective and uses evidence from different sources to evaluate the impact of teaching on learning. Teachers' individual targets are aligned to what pupils should achieve. Better staff training is now supported by opportunities for teachers to observe good practice elsewhere.
- Leaders promote pupils' spiritual, moral and social development effectively. Consequently, pupils are kept safe and behave well. British values are promoted adequately. The school effectively promotes pupils' understanding of both their rights and responsibilities. Pupils learn about other faiths and cultures and so are adequately prepared for life in modern Britain. However, their first-hand experience of children from different backgrounds is not wide, and the school has recently established a link with a successful school in an ethnically diverse London borough in order to extend it.
- Leaders have used the primary school sport funding well. For example, they have recently used the money to pay for the reintroduction of swimming lessons and a qualified sports coach to provide games for every class. More pupils now participate in a wide range of competitions through membership of the local sports partnership, and every pupil has taken part in at least one competition in the last year. Extra training is improving teachers' knowledge of how to develop pupils' skills in more activities. As a result of all these initiatives, pupils' physical skills and well-being are improving.
- Parents are very supportive of the school. Relationships are positive. The school has secure links with other small schools locally. This successfully supports teachers to develop the ways they teach the subjects of the curriculum.
- The local authority has provided good support consistent with the school's 'requiring improvement' status. This helped to sustain the school through the period when it did not have a permanent headteacher. With a capable headteacher now in post, and additional recent support from the local authority, the pace of improvement in teaching and pupils' achievement have accelerated.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are knowledgeable and effective. In troubled times, they have provided direction and

ensured stability. They have shown exceptional commitment to the school. Despite uncertainty about the possible return of the previous headteacher, they were proactive in securing interim headteachers to support the school, and in moving leaders on if their impact was insufficient. They undertake training and understand how the school's performance compares with that of schools nationally. Governors confidently challenge leaders and help to move the school forward. They understand well the strengths and weaknesses of teaching. Governors ensure that pay increases and promotion reflect individual teachers' effectiveness, and are determined that all teaching will be of an equally high standard. Governors ensure the school promotes tolerance, tackles potential discrimination and provides, following recent staff changes, greater equality of opportunity. Governors understand the possible impact of additional funding on gaps in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and others. They ensure, along with senior leaders, that statutory duties are met effectively, including those for the safeguarding of pupils.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Most demonstrate positive attitudes to learning, produce written work to a good standard and are enthusiastic about their learning. However, records show that where teaching has been less effective, pupils' engagement has sometimes reduced and their work has deteriorated.
- Pupils take on many jobs around the school. This contributes well to the smooth running of the school. Pupils have duties as assembly monitors and playground buddies and some are training as play leaders.
- The school's records show that there are few behavioural incidents. Exclusions are rare and pupils' behaviour is consistently well managed.
- Attendance is above average. Effective systems ensure that pupils attend well.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. The site and premises are secure and risk assessments are thorough. Staff are fully checked prior to appointment.
- Pupils feel safe in school and are confident that adults will support them if issues arise.
- Pupils are knowledgeable about firework safety, road safety and safe cycling. The school helps pupils to be vigilant about the dangers of internet abuse and cyber-bullying.
- Pupils' understanding of bullying is promoted well through assemblies and the personal, social and health education programme. Pupils know that bullying may take different forms. They do not feel that it is an issue in school, since pupils mostly treat each other with respect.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Despite ongoing strengths in the teaching of younger pupils, learning slowed in Key Stage 2 in the last two years because of a lack of continuity in teaching. Consequently, pupils in Years 3 to 6 have not made consistently good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Teachers' expectations have not been high enough.
- With recent staff changes, teaching has improved. Even so, teachers do not always provide work which matches the full range of pupils' ability.
- A good pace of learning has been sustained in Years 1 and 2. School data show that progress is now accelerating in Years 3 to 6 because the teaching is more consistently good and pupils are making up lost ground. Pupils now learn effectively in English and mathematics. Teachers make effective use of information and communication technology to support learning.

- The school now supports disabled pupils, those who have special educational needs and those who are disadvantaged more effectively. As a result their progress is improving. Learning support staff are increasingly well used to provide help and guidance for pupils as needed. This is contributing to their improving progress.
- Teachers' expectations of the quality of pupils' written work have risen. Pupils take pride in their written work. Teachers check pupils' progress regularly and provide additional support when necessary. They now ask questions skilfully to check pupils' understanding. Pupils have individual targets in writing and mathematics. The marking of work is now thorough, particularly in writing. Older pupils usually respond to the guidance teachers provide.
- Pupils make the best progress when work offers some challenge. Pupils in Year 2 successfully extended their knowledge of tables and number bonds in a range of activities at different levels of difficulty. This ensured that all groups were suitably challenged.
- Homework contributes well to pupils' learning. Tasks are set and marked regularly.

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Weaker teaching in the last two years, and disrupted leadership, adversely affected pupils' progress in Key Stage 2. Standards at the end of Year 6 fell markedly in 2013. However, progress improved in 2014, and a further improvement is anticipated in 2015. Even so, standards, particularly in mathematics, are not yet high enough, given pupils' starting points on entry to Year 3. Too few pupils have exceeded nationally expected progress in Years 3 to 6, particularly in mathematics.
- The progress made by the small number of disadvantaged pupils varies across the school, but overall it requires improvement. Supplementary teaching had been planned in the autumn term to enable these pupils to make up lost ground more rapidly. Adjustments have been made more recently to ensure that this additional support has more impact on their achievement, but the results are yet to be seen.
- Pupils in Years 3 and 4 did not make sufficient progress earlier in the current year. Following staff changes, their progress is now accelerating and they are making up lost ground rapidly.
- Reception children achieve well. Work in lessons and books and school data show that pupils in Years 1 and 2, who benefit from consistently good teaching, also achieve well.
- The proportion of pupils reaching the nationally expected level in the Year 1 screening check of phonics was broadly average in 2014. This reflects recent improvements in the teaching of phonics. The school prioritises the teaching of reading and provides additional support to older pupils who may have had insufficient grounding in phonics.
- The most able pupils have not excelled as they should, although the most able Year 6 pupils currently in the school are making better progress, and working at much higher than expected levels in mathematics and writing.
- The staff accurately identify the extra help and guidance needed to support disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, and provide it appropriately. In general their progress is accelerating but requires further improvement, in keeping with that of most other pupils.

The early years provision is good

- Children experience good teaching. Effective leadership over time and a productive engagement with a neighbouring outstanding provider have ensured that children continue to achieve well and make better progress than pupils in the rest of the school.

- Most children enter Reception with skills typical for their age. Effective leadership and good teaching ensure that children make good progress so that, on leaving Reception, they are well prepared for entry to Year 1.
- Staff ensure that children are challenged well. The high ratio of adults to children allows children to have frequent adult contact. Good support for disabled children, those who have special educational needs, and the very few children who speak English as an additional language enables them to make good progress. The staff focus appropriately on developing basic skills in literacy and number. Children have positive attitudes to learning, choose resources confidently and concentrate well.
- Children have regular access to the well-developed outdoor learning area, and regularly participate in outdoor learning activities in neighbouring woodland. Such activities contribute to children’s growing knowledge and promote their personal development well.
- Staff ensure that children behave well and that they are safe and well looked after. Good links are established with parents. Parents have a close involvement with the school and their child’s learning.
- Staff know individual children well. Their regular checks and observations provide accurate information about children’s progress, although the records of children’s development are not updated frequently.

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	115127
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	444716

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	111
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue Haggerwood-Bullen
Headteacher	Helen Coop
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2013
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