

Birchwood CofE Primary School

The Mount, Admirals Road, Birchwood, Warrington, Cheshire, WA3 6QG

Inspection dates 19–20 May 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	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		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher and other senior leaders provide strong and ambitious leadership. As a result, the school has made significant improvements since its last inspection.
- Children get off to an outstanding start to their school lives in the vibrant and purposeful early years setting.
- Adults throughout the school are excellent role models, helping to ensure that pupils are well behaved, polite and respectful.
- Pupils' achievement, particularly in mathematics and reading, is improving rapidly. Pupils also achieve well in other subjects such as science and art.
- Pupils feel safe and the school prepares them well to avoid danger, including on the internet.
- Teachers' effective use of questioning to develop pupils' language and reasoning skills is a significant factor in helping pupils to make good progress.
- Governors take decisive actions that reflect their passion and determination to make a positive difference for the pupils in the school.
- The relentless drive of the headteacher and the commitment and hard work of staff ensure that teaching is good and improving.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. Their positive attitudes to learning and each other are one of the reasons why they make good progress.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Efforts to improve attendance are not fully effective in reducing overall levels of pupil absence.
- Some of the most able pupils do not make as much progress as they could in lessons because work is not always explicitly planned for them.
- Pupils' progress in writing is not as strong as it is in reading and mathematics.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed lessons in each class of the school, including two joint observations with the headteacher.
- Discussions were held with senior leaders, members of staff, groups of pupils, five representatives of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and a representative of the Diocese.
- Inspectors examined a wide range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils informally during the school day and observed them during playtime, lunch and before and after school. They also met formally with a small group of pupils from the school council.
- Inspectors heard a number of children read.
- Inspectors took note of displays around the school and the work in the outdoor areas.
- The school's tracking of pupils' progress was examined alongside the work in pupils' books.
- Inspectors spoke to a small number of parents at the start of the day. There were insufficient responses logged on Parent view, the online questionnaire, for inspectors to analyse. Inspectors however, took note of the responses to the school's recent parental questionnaire as well as the 25 responses they received to the inspection questionnaire for school staff.

Inspection team

Martin Bell, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Stewart Plowes

Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average-sized primary school.
- There is an on-site breakfast club that is run by the school.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage, while the proportion of pupils for whom English is not or believed not to be their first language is well below the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium funding is almost double the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is above the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- The school was judged to have serious weaknesses at its previous inspection in January 2014.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and raise achievement further by making sure that:
 - teachers plan work for the most able pupils that meets their needs and enables them to make more rapid progress during lessons
 - pupils have more opportunities to develop their writing skills so that progress in this subject is at least as good as that in mathematics and reading.
- Improve leadership and management further by ensuring that the actions taken to improve attendance are effective at reducing pupil absence.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The determined and ambitious leadership of the headteacher, supported well by other senior leaders has brought about significant improvements since the previous inspection. The headteacher's relentless focus to improve the quality of teaching has resulted in most teaching now being good.
- Senior leaders have a highly aspirational vision for the school and are not prepared to accept second best. The dynamic leadership of the headteacher has brought cohesiveness to the school community and everyone is working towards the same goal. Contributions are valued and morale is high.
- Senior leaders are effectively improving the quality of teaching and learning. They undertake regular checks of books, observations of lessons and analysis of data to gain a thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and to tailor support and training for teachers. Senior leaders utilise their own expert skills to demonstrate and model good and outstanding teaching.
- Governors and senior leaders ensure that they promote equality of opportunity and tackle discrimination. 'Diversity Week' held this year, alongside displays throughout the school such as 'different families: same love' help pupils to understand a range of other cultures and lives, as well as dispel negative stereotypes. The curriculum is evolving but is rich in its opportunities to develop the arts. There are many high-quality examples of artwork throughout the school and pupils' work has recently been displayed at the Primary Arts Network exhibition. Pupils develop a good understanding of British values, law and democracy. For instance, children wrote their own manifestos and held elections to coincide with the recent general election. Pupils in a Key Stage 2 class have held discussions about the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and linked it to their own lives and behaviour in school.
- Mathematics and English leaders know their subjects well. This has enabled them to pinpoint areas for improvement and deliver training for staff that has directly contributed to improvements in the quality of teaching. For instance, the mathematics leader has modelled lessons for colleagues to demonstrate the use of images and practical resources to support pupils' understanding of new concepts.
- Middle leaders have a shared passion for school improvement and display a sense of strong teamwork. They have been supported in their professional development by being given opportunities to observe lessons with the headteacher, interview pupils and scrutinise books. Their role is developing but is beginning to impact positively on the quality of teaching and the development of the curriculum throughout the school.
- Specialist sports coaches are employed using the primary physical education and sport funding. This has enabled the school to offer a wide range of different sports such as outdoor adventure activities, tennis and karate. The provision of extra-curricular after-school activities has resulted in increased participation rates.
- Senior leaders and governors carefully consider how best to utilise pupil premium funding. The employment of a pastoral manager and extra support staff has contributed to ensuring that disadvantaged pupils achieve well and that the gap in the attainment they reach in comparison to other pupils is narrowing.
- The headteacher uses performance management procedures effectively to hold teachers to account for the achievement of pupils. Teachers' objectives are closely matched to the needs of the school and support and training are clearly outlined. The headteacher and governors use the outcomes of performance management reviews to make decisions about teachers' pay progression.
- The headteachers' plan for improvement is a working document that concisely maps out actions to improve the quality of teaching and raise achievement. It provides a useful tool for everyone to know what is expected of them and enables checks on how successful actions have been. The headteacher is now beginning to develop a longer-term strategic plan that extends beyond 18 months.
- The local authority has provided effective support in helping the leadership of the school to secure improvement. The local authority senior advisor has delivered training to governors, helping them to become more effective at challenging the decisions of the headteacher. Through her attendance at governing body meetings the local authority representative has also been able to ensure that checks on the progress towards improvement are robust. The Diocesan representative has also provided effective support for the school and is a valuable member of the governing body. Financial contributions from the Diocese to the school have enabled substantial environmental changes to classrooms that have impacted positively on improving behaviour.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors share the determination and ambition of the headteacher. Visits to the school, links with

subject leaders, use of performance data and regular meetings where standards are the focus, help governors to know the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Governors use this information to ask challenging questions of senior leaders to check that actions are making a positive difference to the pupils.

- Governors fulfil their statutory responsibilities and are particularly vigilant to ensure that safeguarding procedures are robust and effective. They help ensure that there is equality of opportunity for all groups of pupils at the school by checking on how effective pupil premium funding is at narrowing the achievement gap between disadvantaged pupils and others. They also ask the leader with responsibility for pupils with special educational needs to present them with information about achievement so that they can challenge decisions about the deployment of support staff and ensure that this group of pupils is achieving well.
- Governors have a very accurate view of the performance management of teachers and use this information to challenge and support the headteachers' decisions about pay progression.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes towards their learning. Teachers have high expectations of behaviour and this is reflected in how pupils enter their classroom ready to learn. Pupils listen attentively to their teachers and respond enthusiastically to instructions. They work alongside one another with tolerance and respect irrespective of gender, age or background.
- Pupils' behaviour in the playground and around the school is a significant strength. Pupils play calmly during break and lunchtimes and are increasingly able to resolve their own differences. They are proud of their school and treat the environment with respect by ensuring, for instance, that all litter is placed in bins.
- Pupils speak highly of the influence that the pastoral manager has had in helping to improve behaviour. Her work to support teachers to introduce a new behaviour policy and to establish provision that targets the specific needs of some of the most vulnerable children has helped to improve behaviour significantly.
- Pupils are polite and respectful. They welcome visitors warmly and are keen to engage in conversation about their school. They wear their uniform smartly with pride and say that they are looking forward to wearing the new uniform that they helped design next term.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Pupils report that they feel safe, they know how and to whom to report any concerns. The school website has good advice for pupils about bullying and e-safety. There is also a digital worry box that means pupils can report their concerns even when not at school.
- Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, including when online. They understand about different forms of bullying and say that bullying is rare in their school. The work of the pastoral manager, linked to the NSPCC 'underwear rule' also helps ensure that pupils know how to keep themselves safe from sexual abuse.
- The pastoral manager follows up any pupil absence robustly. Attendance patterns are analysed and followed up with support for families. As a result, the incidence of persistent absence has fallen significantly over the past year. However, other initiatives to improve overall attendance have been less effective with the percentage of pupils missing school remaining above the national average.
- Senior leaders are especially diligent in ensuring that all statutory safeguarding duties are met.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Pupils say, 'lessons are fun' and 'we wouldn't change anything about them, as they teach us everything we need to know'. Teachers plan lessons that engage, enthuse and challenge most pupils. In one Year 4 lesson, pupils were asked to respond to a letter asking for help to control a dragon. This activity inspired pupils to write high quality and complex sentences. However, in some classes the most-able pupils are not always challenged fully as activities are not explicitly planned to meet their needs.
- A key strength of the quality of teaching is adults' skilful use of questioning to develop pupils' lines of

enquiry and reasoning skills. In Year 5 for instance, the class teacher used a range of searching questions to encourage pupils to justify their answers about the choices a character in a story might make.

- In most classes, teachers check effectively on the progress that pupils are making during lessons. They use these assessments to add further challenge or emphasise an important learning point. For example, during a mathematics lesson in Year 3 the teacher stopped the class to allow a pupil to share how she had begun to solve a puzzle systematically. This contributed to other pupils adapting their approaches and making good progress during the lesson.
- Teachers' feedback during lessons helps pupils in some classes to understand what they need to do to improve their work. Vibrant learning environments thoughtfully organised with relevant 'working walls' also help pupils to understand how to make their work better. In Year 6 for example, pupils referred to a detailed 'working wall' when checking what they needed to include in a letter to persuade the headteacher to allow them to go on a school trip.
- Evidence in mathematics books shows that opportunities for pupils to solve problems and develop reasoning skills are increasing. Consequently, pupils are now more confident in being able to apply their mathematical skills in different contexts. However, in a small number of classes teachers' low expectations of standards of presentation mean that pupils make mistakes in their calculations.
- Pupils across the school enjoy writing. However, opportunities to develop their skills across the wider curriculum are not fully developed, resulting in progress that is not as strong as that seen in reading and mathematics.
- Teachers encourage good attitudes towards reading. One pupil in Year 3 explained how he loves reading because, 'I can use my imagination to take me to other places and worlds'. Significant improvements in the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make) have resulted in pupils being able to apply their skills to read tricky words with fluency and understanding.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Senior leaders' relentless focus on improving the quality of teaching has ensured that achievement has improved significantly since the previous inspection.
- Achievement in Key Stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics improved in 2014 and evidence in pupils' books and from the school's own data, shows that achievement is set to improve in 2015. This represents good progress for the current Year 2 cohort who left the early years setting with skills significantly below those typical for their age. Nonetheless, attainment for pupils leaving Key Stage 1 is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the phonics screening check has improved significantly since 2012 when 4% of pupils reached the expected standard. Improvements in the quality of how phonics is taught have resulted in the percentage of pupils currently working at the expected standard being close to that seen nationally.
- Progress in most classes in Key Stage 2 is good. A very large majority of pupils makes accelerated progress in reading and mathematics and greater proportions of pupils are working at age-related expectations. Progress in writing in some year groups, however, is not yet as strong, but evidence in writing books shows that pupils are making expected progress. The school's own data and evidence in books indicate that, this year, the proportion of eleven year olds making or exceeding expected progress is likely to be similar to the most recent national averages.
- Pupils who are known to be disadvantaged achieve well. The gap between their achievement and that of non-disadvantaged pupils nationally is narrowing rapidly. The progress of disadvantaged pupils is at least in line with, and often better than that of other pupils in school. In 2014 pupils left Year 6 approximately two and a half terms behind non-disadvantaged pupils nationally in attainment in reading, writing and mathematics. The gap to other pupils in school was close to being two terms behind in writing, one and a half terms behind in reading and, due to the high achievement of other pupils, five terms behind in mathematics.
- The most able pupils generally make expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics. However, a greater proportion of the most able pupils make more-than-expected progress in mathematics than that seen nationally.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress. Teachers have high expectations of what this group of pupils can achieve and ensure that work is well matched to their needs. Their progress is rigorously tracked by the special educational needs leader to ensure that pupils receive any additional support that they require to ensure that they achieve well.

The early years provision**is outstanding**

- Children flourish and their confidence and skills soar in early years, as a result of outstanding leadership and teaching. Consequently, children are well prepared for their transition into Year 1. A significant proportion of children enter the Nursery with skills and knowledge that are well below that which is typical for their age, particularly in the areas of communication and language and personal and social development. They make strong progress so that by the time they leave Reception the proportion of children achieving a good level of development is above the national average.
- A vibrant, language-rich and purposeful indoor and outdoor environment inspires children's learning. Teachers carefully plan activities and lessons that captivate children's imagination. For example, large numbers of children in the Reception class were inspired to write about the butterflies for which they had cared. Other children enjoyed reading *Christopher's Caterpillars* by Charlotte Middleton that helped them to remember the life cycle of the butterfly. Children sustain their concentration and interest in the activities provided because they find them exciting and interesting.
- Children's behaviour is exemplary because of the clear structures, routines and high expectations of adults. Children are kept safe and are supervised appropriately, without restricting creativity and imagination, by vigilant staff. For example, children in the Nursery class chose to construct their own balancing trail and spent time excitedly testing it out in the outdoor environment.
- Adults develop children's social, emotional and communication skills expertly. Children play alongside each other and with each other politely and respectfully. Children are able to resolve their own differences with little intervention from adults. Boys in the Nursery class were observed sorting out who was going to be the goalkeeper in a football game and were able to arrive at a compromise with only limited intervention.
- Leadership is outstanding. The early years leaders, supported by the Nursery teacher and other adults, form a strong team which works collaboratively towards the same aspirational goals. Accurate assessments are used effectively to track children's progress and adapt provision in response to their needs. Parental involvement is increasing and parents are welcomed into the early years setting for regular open days.

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	462630

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	203
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Littlewood
Headteacher	Dawn Rapson
Date of previous school inspection	15 January 2014
Telephone number	01925 823316
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