

Birchwood Primary School

Valiant Road, Martlesham Heath, Ipswich, Suffolk IP5 3SP

Inspection dates

13–14 October 2016

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
Early years provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The headteacher, other leaders and governors have relentlessly focused on improving teaching and pupils' outcomes. As a result of their very effective actions, teaching, learning and assessment, and outcomes for pupils throughout the school are now outstanding.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher provide outstanding leadership, and are supported by other very able leaders. Their commitment to providing the very best education for all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and the most able, is palpable in all they do.
- By the end of Year 6, a consistently high proportion of pupils attain above-average standards in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2016, unvalidated assessments show that this is still the case. There was, however, an uncharacteristic dip in pupils' progress in mathematics in Year 6 only.
- Children in the early years get off to a great start and make rapid progress. The proportion who attain a good level of development is consistently above average.
- By the time they reach the end of Year 2, pupils make rapid progress and achieve extremely well in reading, writing and mathematics.
- All adults have very high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Learning continually engages, challenges and motivates pupils to enjoy their learning and make rapid progress in a range of subjects.
- Pupils are taught a highly stimulating curriculum which is both broad and balanced. They have many and varied opportunities to study and hone their skills.
- The learning environment in lessons enables pupils to thrive and develop into self-assured, confident individuals. Pupils have exceptionally positive attitudes to learning. They take huge pride in their work and are keen to show their successes both inside and outside of school.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is impeccable. They are extremely polite and courteous to their peers and adults, and are supportive of one another.
- The school's arrangements for keeping pupils safe are very effective. Pupils feel very safe and know how to keep themselves safe.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school.
- Parents are overwhelmingly supportive about all aspects of the school's work.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further develop links with the local community and further afield so that:
 - outcomes for pupils are improved for all pupils
 - other providers benefit from the expertise that the school has to offer
 - regular training and development continues to enhance staff skills.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The headteacher provides outstanding leadership of the school. He is tireless in pursuit of excellence. As a consequence, he has appointed equally passionate and high-quality leaders who support his quest for the highest quality of education for pupils. A culture of self-improvement is strongly embedded and runs throughout the whole school, including the pupils. 'I can't praise the school enough. Everything about it is helping my daughter progress,' was how one parent expressed it.
- Leaders at all levels know the school well. They are not complacent and continually challenge themselves and others about the impact the plans they put in place are having on pupils' outcomes. There is, therefore, total commitment from each and every one of them to be reflective and alter whatever is not working without any fuss or delay.
- Development of the school's relationship with parents has been constant. As a consequence, parents are hugely supportive of, and positive about, the school. The school has formed strong partnerships with parents. This ensures that pupils benefit enormously from the highly effective support parents provide for their children's learning. One parent commented, 'The school makes excellent effort to provide information and training sessions to parents to help them support their children's learning.'
- The headteacher is firmly focused on developing leaders from within the school. He is adept at identifying potential leaders and enabling them to flourish. For example, the leader of the Food for Life programme has successfully led the school through to the achievement of gaining the gold award. This involved her in the competitive process of tendering for new catering provision in the school. There are many examples of the talented staff being nurtured to the benefit of the whole school.
- Middle leaders' contribution to school development is highly effective. They are passionate about their areas of responsibility. They have been integral to the improving the quality of teaching in all subjects, often providing valuable support to help colleagues improve. Subject leaders know the standards in their subject across the school. The improvement plans they write are reflective of high-quality monitoring and evaluation which includes observing practice, scrutiny of pupils' work and checking pupils' achievement. As a consequence, pupils achieve well in all areas of the curriculum.
- The highly effective assessment procedures are well established and reflect the changes in assessment protocols introduced in 2015. Leaders track pupils' progress and attainment meticulously in order to quickly identify individuals or groups who are at risk of falling behind their classmates. Equally, this information is used expertly to identify the most able and ensure that provision is put in place to address their needs. As a result of this forensic use of the school's assessment information, all groups of pupils make at least expected progress and a substantial proportion make accelerated progress.
- Additional government funding, including the pupil premium and sports funding, is

used well to support the needs of the small group of most vulnerable pupils. As a result, disadvantaged pupils make rapid progress and achieve at least in line with other pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. The effective use of sports funding has ensured that almost all pupils regularly take part in sport each week. Pupils know how to keep themselves fit and healthy and thrive in sport, many taking part in competitions at a local and national level.

- The new, innovative, rich and dynamic curriculum enables pupils to develop a real zest for learning. Pupils love the themes they explore and the involvement they have had in deciding on what they want to explore. Brought together by the Forest School, Food for Life, Eco-school and sporting curriculums, pupils benefit hugely from so many 'real' experiences. The quality of the work that this 'bespoke curriculum' elicits is second to none. Adding to this the well-developed links with the community and local businesses, pupils at Birchwood are very well prepared for life beyond the school gates.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school. There are countless examples and evidence of pupils' valuing diversity and how they are prepared for the future in modern Britain. Teaching alone allows pupils to take ownership of their own learning, and to raise the wider questions of why, where and how events happen.
- Birchwood belongs to a pyramid of schools which provides valuable peer support to each school. Not only does it allow leaders to share good practice but also ensures that leaders' judgements about the quality of teaching and how well pupils are achieving are correct. Many leaders within this school support other schools, particularly where there is a specialism. This is becoming more and more prevalent spreading also to a national level. Birchwood is, for example, now part of an 'elite group of five schools' working with the Department for Education to share how their innovative work with the most able pupils is effectively improving their outcomes.

Governance of the school

- Governance is skilfully led by an experienced and highly competent chair. Equally, the governing body consists of able and committed governors who are passionate about the school and the place it holds at the centre of the local community.
- There exists a very open and honest relationship between leaders and governors. As a consequence, governors understand the school's current priorities and the improvements that leaders have identified. They readily challenge leaders and visit the school to check on progress towards those priorities.
- Governors ensure that pupils who are disadvantaged achieve as well as other pupils nationally and hold leaders to account for the progress of each pupil within the school. They therefore know the impact that this and the sports premium additional funding have on pupils' progress.
- Governors, along with leaders, constantly look to further develop the strategic links that the school has with other schools and the community. The governing body values the training and development of all staff and regularly reviews how this is benefiting pupils within the school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

- The headteacher, in particular, is passionate in his commitment and pursuit in ensuring that safeguarding procedures are robust. As a result, governors and other leaders have a very good understanding of up-to-date information and training is delivered regularly to all staff.
- All the necessary checks have been carried out on staff to ensure that they are able to work with children. Office staff regularly visit other schools to compare their practice and to make any changes that they feel will benefit the school and its pupils. Staff files are meticulously maintained, as is the school's single central register of recruitment checks, which is monitored regularly by leaders and governors.
- Staff are vigilant and know what to do if they have any concerns about a pupil's welfare. Where this is the case, leaders take swift action and meticulously follow the correct procedures. The school works very effectively with other agencies when required. The headteacher will leave no stone unturned to ensure that pupils are safe and that they receive the care they deserve both from within the school and from external agencies.
- Leaders challenge any stereotypical views and very effectively help pupils to increase their understanding of current social issues, such as extremism. The school's watchful culture permeates throughout. As one parent commented, 'I feel very reassured leaving my children in the school's care.'

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- There is a clear and unwavering focus on learning. As a result, teaching over time is leading to outstanding outcomes for pupils currently in the school. Work in pupils' books and the school's progress information show that a growing proportion of pupils are making outstanding progress. This is because all adults have high expectations of pupils and want them to succeed. Pupils are encouraged to think for and challenge themselves.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge. Many teachers are specialists in their own field who share their expertise passionately with colleagues, pupils and, indeed, parents. Strong effective teaching in PE and English are but two examples. The walls are adorned with learning prompts and pupils' work, so that pupils know that they are valued and that their achievements are celebrated.
- Teachers use information about how well pupils are achieving in each subject to plan challenging activities that meet the needs of each pupil. Pupils' work is therefore pitched precisely to build on what they know. Adults quickly identify any pupils who may be struggling with their work and support them very well so that they can rapidly catch up with their classmates.
- Teaching assistants provide high-quality support to pupils' learning. Individuals and groups of pupils overcome misconceptions and move on quickly with their learning. This is because leaders ensure that teaching assistants receive excellent training that equips them with good subject knowledge. As a result, phonics is taught exceptionally well by all adults.
- The quality of written feedback that teachers give pupils is superb. Pupils say that it helps them improve their learning. They eagerly respond to teachers' suggestions and make changes to their work. What is more, they remember this well in their future

learning and rarely repeat errors. Adults carefully check on pupils' learning throughout lessons and capitalise expertly on pupils' responses to reshape activities and expectations. As a result, no learning time is lost and all pupils are actively engaged in learning that both interests and challenges them.

- Teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour, and expect them to work hard. Pupils aspire to learn and improve because this is the expectation of all adults around them. As a result, the presentation of pupils' work is excellent at all ages. They take great pride in the work in their books.
- Leaders encourage teachers to be creative and to motivate pupils. The 'WoW' curriculum undoubtedly supports teachers in this aim. Finding out what pupils already know and what they want to find out, is commonplace and drives the direction that teaching and learning takes. As a consequence, pupils confidently engage in research and are enabled to make excellent links between various areas of the curriculum because their imagination has been captured.
- All adults are skilled at questioning pupils. They ask and enable pupils to expand and justify their answers, more often than not to other pupils. The level of debate is impressive. Pupils in Year 1 were trying to ascertain what type of fruit they had in front of them; pupils in Year 6 debated how to improve other pupils' descriptive work from pictures of scenes taken from 'Kensuke's kingdom'.
- Teachers consistently use subject-specific language across the range of subjects and expect pupils to do the same. For example, in Year 3 pupils studying the Ancient Egyptians were discussing the mummification of bodies and which organs would be taken out and put in canopic jars. In Year 6, pupils writing descriptively told inspectors about the use of oxymorons, such as, for example, 'deafening silence'. Pupils learn and achieve extremely well in such a highly stimulating environment.
- The most able pupils are constantly challenged not only within the classroom but also with other specific activities that ensure that they think more deeply. As a consequence, pupils say that they 'like the challenge and the experiences we are offered' so that work is not too easy for them. The 'masterclasses' that many pupils take part in for tennis, for example, or Shakespeare, not only demonstrate the variety of activities that pupils experience, but also the amazing outcomes that they are capable of.
- Pupils read widely and often. As a consequence, they develop into confident readers, including the least and most able readers. They like the class novels that spearhead the thematic approach to the curriculum and respond well when asked about aspects of the book. They understand about different authors' techniques and use this well in their writing, for example, in the style of JK Rowling. As a consequence, pupils' writing shows clear influences of the variety of books they have read. Writing is therefore of very high quality, from the youngest to the oldest pupils in the school.
- Pupils are given many opportunities and experiences that make learning mathematics relevant and real. Across the school, pupils are constantly engaged in estimating, calculating and measuring. The 'Birchwood Bolts' curriculum offers particularly exciting opportunities for such activity, for example when pupils learn about the amount of electricity the solar panels generate, or when they cost out how much to sell their homemade jams and chutneys for at the Farmers' Market.

- Parents say that their children are taught well and receive, as one parent described it, 'an outstanding education.' They are highly complementary about the leaders at the school and the way that teachers know all pupils, regardless of which class they are in. The school works incredibly hard to ensure that parents are kept informed about how well their children are doing, be it through open evenings, newsletters, celebration assemblies or more informally. They are even regularly in the local newspaper for parents to see. One parent commented, 'Communication from school to parents is exemplary. We couldn't ask for more.'
- Teaching in subjects other than English and mathematics is also very strong. Pupils are given high-quality experiences in, for example, art, history and science that allow them to use and apply their literacy and numeracy skills. Pupils have a good understanding about British and world events and take great interest in, for example, the Olympics.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Birchwood's 'BART values' are woven seamlessly throughout the school's ethos and curriculum. Staff translate the school's motto 'passionate about learning' into their teaching exceptionally well. Consequently, this oozes from pupils in every situation, and in particular from the 'meeters and greeters' who keenly welcome any visitors to their classroom.
- The school fosters an enabling environment that allows pupils to aspire and thrive. One parent described it perfectly: 'Birchwood is a fantastic school and regularly goes above and beyond the ordinary to provide care and a balanced learning environment.'
- Pupils have impeccable attitudes to learning in all lessons. They want to do well because of the ambitious culture of the school. The walls are adorned with various achievements from not only the school as a whole, but also individual pupils: from Year 2 coming ninth in the national competition for gymnastics, to an Eco-School award.
- Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe and healthy. For example, pupils regularly prepare and cook the food grown in the school's garden, and understand the importance of hand-washing and food hygiene. During the inspection, pupils were taught how to keep themselves safe while using the internet. Pupils say they feel very safe in the school, which parents say 'is almost like a family'.
- Parents spoken to were overwhelmingly positive about the care the school provides. One parent said, 'The emotional support and extra stuff they get is phenomenal.'
- Pupils are given many opportunities to experience leadership roles and to take on positions of responsibility. They value these experiences and talk confidently and with pride about what they are expected to do. 'I like it how we have different jobs like being a head gardener or an eco-monitor,' said one pupil. On every wall there are examples of not just the roles themselves but the impact they are having, both on the school and on the local community. From writing to the local Parish Council about the need for a fence around the school's chicken area, to expressing concern to the Department for Education about needing to 'give a stronger message' in their posters about road safety. Needless to say, both 'pleas' were successful.

- The school's motto is 'Passionate About Learning'. This permeates everything they do. As a consequence, pupils are exceptionally well prepared for their life beyond school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- The school's systems for rewarding pupils are in place and implemented consistently by all staff, including those who coach sporting activities. These strategies are almost imperceptible, but subtly underpin the high expectations that all staff have of pupils' behaviour. They would rather be on the 'rainbow' than on the 'thunderstorm'.
- There are, therefore, very few incidents of poor behaviour. The very few who may struggle on occasions to control their behaviour are only discernible when pointed out to inspectors. They would not otherwise be noticed because all adults manage these pupils' behaviour exceptionally well. Pupils say that should behaviour be less than good, it is dealt with very quickly. Parents likewise report that pupils' behaviour is very good.
- Pupils understand what bullying is and the different forms that bullying takes. They are clear that bullying does not occur. During the inspection, pupils were very supportive of and polite to each other in lessons and at other times.
- Pupils behave well during play time. They have a wide range of activities to make playtimes fun and active, and pupils play cooperatively with each other. Pupils are well supervised, adults joining in with activities. At lunchtime, pupils' behaviour is exemplary because expectations from all adults are high. Pupils are rewarded for demonstrating their good table manners and behaviour when they are eating. The 'peaceful plate' award allows pupils to be served first and to sit at a special table with a friend of their choice.
- Pupils enjoy school and the vast majority rarely miss a day. Nevertheless, although in line with the national average overall, attendance is often well above in the majority of individual classes. Office staff are relentless in checking the whereabouts of any individual pupil who has not arrived at school. Pupils are consistently punctual and are ready to learn. The school's breakfast club undoubtedly supports this.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and the most able, make rapid progress across the school from their starting points, and across a range of subjects. As one parent commented, 'My daughter is challenged to achieve the very best she possibly can.'
- The proportion of pupils in Year 1 who reach the expected standard in the phonics screening check has been above average for the last two years, including the provisional results for 2016.
- The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 1 has been significantly above the national average for the last two years. The provisional results for 2016 show that the standards at the end of Year 2 continue to be high.
- Pupils' attainment at the end of key stage 2 has been significantly above the national

average in reading, writing and mathematics for five years. In 2015, the proportion of pupils making expected progress from their individual starting points, and those who made more than expected progress, were also above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. The provisional results for 2016 indicate that this continues to be the case, but with a notable and uncharacteristic dip in mathematics. The forensic investigation that leaders undertook clearly shows that eight pupils were one mark from scoring what was expected of them. This made a huge difference to the overall outcome. Leaders have reflected on this and have put in place actions to ensure that pupils are better prepared for next summer's assessments.

- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive very well targeted support. As a result, pupils continue to make at least good progress, both academically and personally, in line with their peers nationally.
- There is a relatively small number of pupils across the school that are disadvantaged. However, their progress at the end of key stages 1 and 2 is good from their individual starting points and when compared with pupils nationally. Evidence seen in pupils' books and the school's assessment information of current pupils shows that they are making progress at least in line with their classmates, and often more so.
- The most able pupils have historically achieved very well at the end of key stages 1 and 2. In 2014 and 2015, the proportion of pupils who achieved the higher levels in Year 2 was above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2014 and 2015, more-able pupils attained significantly better than the national average at the end of Year 6. The proportion of pupils who made more than expected progress was above the national average. Early indications for 2016 are that the proportion of pupils who achieved greater depth is high in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils love reading. They read widely and often and particularly like the class novels that teachers read to them on a daily basis. They regularly write book reviews to inspire other pupils to read 'their book'. Lower-ability readers read with confidence, using the phonic skills that they have learned so well. Higher-ability readers are extremely confident and read with a high degree of fluency and expression.
- The influence that pupils' interest in and experience of books is having on pupils' writing is palpable. Pupils of all abilities have many and regular opportunities to develop their writing skills in other areas of the national curriculum. This they do to the same high standard as in English.
- As well as in English and mathematics, pupils' work in all areas of the curriculum shows that they are making at least good progress. Work seen in art, science, humanities and PE is impressive, and demonstrates that pupils are developing very high skills in these subjects.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- Leadership of early years is highly effective. There is a strong emphasis on developing a caring, nurturing and challenging environment. In the short time that the children have been in school this term, they have settled extremely well. Children therefore get off to a great start.
- Children are well supported to make the transition into the Reception Year. This begins

with many visits to pre-schools and homes. A carefully planned introduction to the school for children in the summer term prior to their arrival ensures that all staff know the children well. Leaders establish very strong links with parents and have the information about their children's skills, knowledge and interests, upon which they build appropriately.

- Children join the Reception class with skills and understanding that are broadly typical for their age. They make excellent progress due to the high-quality teaching they receive. The proportion of children reaching the expected level of development has increased since the previous inspection. It is now well above the national average, with a large proportion of children exceeding the expected level. They are therefore well prepared for their move into Year 1.
- The early years staff all have very high expectations and show a relentless ambition to improve children's outcomes. The teachers have an excellent understanding of children's progress information and use this accurately to improve the provision and ensure that activities are well planned to meet the needs of each child. Consequently, teaching is highly effective and children clearly relish their school day.
- Children learn in a very stimulating and safe environment. They have plenty of equipment both inside and outside of the classroom to support their learning. They know how to judge risks and keep themselves safe while learning.
- Phonic teaching is of high quality. Children therefore achieve well in their reading and are confident readers by the end of their Reception Year. When looking through children's writing from the last academic year, inspectors noted good use of simple punctuation and sensible guesses to spelling. Children were writing at some length and had a good understanding of the purpose of lines and how to use finger spaces to help them.
- Mathematics is taught extremely effectively. Children have a variety of equipment to hand and use this well to help them count up to 10, and some beyond, with no adult support.
- Children are exceptionally well behaved. They frequently ask to join activities when other children are using equipment using such phrases as 'Can I play with this with you?' Their attitude to learning, even at such an early time in the school year, is impressive. They concentrate well and for prolonged periods, and no learning time is wasted.

School details

Unique reference number	124681
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10019208

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	212
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Hesketh
Headteacher	Stephen Cloke
Telephone number	01473 610701
Website	www.birchwoodprimary.co.uk
Email address	admin@birchwood.suffolk.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	19–20 September 2011

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- Birchwood is an average-sized primary school which predominantly serves the Martlesham Heath area, but increasingly is the school of choice for pupils from further afield.
- The majority of pupils are White British, although the proportion of pupils from other backgrounds has increased since the previous inspection. Very few pupils are in the early stages of learning to speak English.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. However, the proportion who are supported by a statement of educational need or an education, health and care (EHC) plan is above average.

- Very few pupils join or leave the school throughout the year and the number of pupils on roll has reached the capacity of the school.
- The school has recently achieved the Gold Award for the Food for Life scheme. The school holds the Quality Mark for Physical Education and is an Eco-Ambassador School for the East of England.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited a number of classrooms, many with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, to observe learning and to talk with pupils about their work.
- Inspectors met formally with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and other leaders, including the special educational needs co-ordinator and the leader of early years. Meetings were held with five governors, including the vice-chair, and with a group of 10 pupils. The lead inspector spoke on the telephone with a representative of the local authority and the chair of governors.
- Along with senior leaders, inspectors looked at a wide variety of pupils' work from this and last academic year. Pupils' work on walls was also viewed.
- An inspector listened to a small group of pupils read and other inspectors spoke with pupils about their reading in lessons.
- The lead inspector checked the school's documentation on safeguarding, behaviour, attendance and the quality of teaching. She also considered the school's evaluation of its own work, its plans for improvement, information about pupils' progress and performance management.
- Inspectors took into consideration 55 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire and 62 texts. In addition, 74 pupil and 21 staff responses were also considered.

Inspection team

Ruth Brock, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Lynn Lowery	Ofsted Inspector
James Richards	Ofsted Inspector

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