

# Birchanger Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

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

## Inspection dates

7–8 February 2017

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Good</b>
Early years provision	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- The headteacher's strong leadership and clear vision have secured substantial improvements since the previous inspection.
- Checks on teaching and learning are rigorous and systematic. Focused training and support for both teachers and teaching assistants has led to raised expectations and good teaching across the school.
- The governors are knowledgeable, dedicated and well trained. They have a good understanding of the school's performance. They skilfully support and challenge school leaders.
- All groups of pupils currently in the school are making good progress from different starting points. Pupils who are new to the school have their needs quickly assessed and their progress is carefully checked.
- The teaching of phonics is effective and well matched to pupils' needs. Reading skills are taught consistently but reading comprehension skills are less well developed.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged make good progress because their needs are accurately identified and effectively met.
- The curriculum is well planned to take account of the mixed-age classes. Pupils learn well through a wide range of topics, subjects and experiences.
- Children in Reception make good progress and are well prepared for Year 1. This is the result of an engaging curriculum and a positive learning environment.
- Pupils feel safe in this inclusive and welcoming school. The personal development and welfare of pupils has a high priority and pupils' behaviour is good.
- Fewer pupils than nationally reached the expected standard at the end of Year 6 in 2016. However, they had made good and better progress during their time at the school.
- Some pupils make slower progress in mathematics due to a lack of fluency in mental calculations.
- Early reading is taught well and pupils develop an enjoyment of reading. However, pupils' comprehension skills are underdeveloped in upper key stage 2.
- Progress is not checked well in subjects other than reading, writing and mathematics.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that pupils make more rapid progress by:
  - improving the accuracy of the mental recall of key number facts so that pupils are able to solve problems more efficiently and accurately
  - developing reading skills so that pupils in Years 5 and 6 are able to comment on a writers' use of language and identify different layers of meaning within a text
  - ensuring that the current good practice in monitoring and assessing pupil progress is used across a wider range of subjects.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher has created a culture of high expectation that is embraced by the whole school community. Her determination and clarity of purpose have resulted in all groups of pupils in the school making good progress across a range of subjects.
- The headteacher has built a strong team of leaders who share collective responsibility and accountability for improving pupils' outcomes. They lead by example, demonstrating an effective range of strategies which continually improve pupils' learning.
- Leaders have implemented rigorous processes for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching. Teachers' performance management targets are closely linked to clearly identified school improvement priorities.
- Teachers use effective assessment procedures to plan learning activities that are closely matched to pupils' needs. Effective tracking of the progress pupils make is well established in reading, writing and mathematics. However, the systems to check how well pupils are progressing in other subjects are less well developed.
- Leaders have implemented procedures to ensure that the significant number of pupils who start at the school later than in the Reception Year have their needs met quickly and make good progress. This transition of pupils is managed well.
- Effective staff training has been central to the school's improvement since the last inspection. Induction of new staff members is focused on ensuring that school policies and practices are understood and implemented consistently. Teachers and teaching assistants have access to high-quality training. They work very effectively as a team, using their training well to improve pupils' outcomes, particularly in reading and writing.
- The school's curriculum is suitably broad and balanced. There are planned opportunities to reinforce learning across the curriculum. For instance, in a Year 4 history lesson pupils were given the opportunity to develop their mathematical skills by investigating whether they could build a pyramid by incorporating mathematical patterns into their designs.
- Pupils are provided with plentiful opportunities to develop a deeper knowledge and understanding of the wider world. For example, teachers plan a series of visits to local and national places of interest. British values, such as tolerance and respect, are consistently modelled by leaders, which helps develop pupils' positive attitudes. A calendar of events, such as the book week linked to a local festival, further broaden their experiences.
- The primary physical education (PE) and sport funding is spent well. A specialist coach provides dedicated sports teaching. All pupils have the opportunity to participate in both collaborative and competitive sport. Leaders are committed to developing high-quality PE and have been very successful in doing so.

- As part of the school's commitment to developing healthy lifestyles, pupils on the school council were directly involved in adapting the school lunch menu.
- Governors have extended the leadership time available to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The additional funding received for these pupils is used more effectively and their progress has been accelerated.
- The pupil premium grant is used effectively. A review of how it is spent was carried out following the previous inspection. Governors and leaders have addressed the issues highlighted by the review. They have implemented effective plans to identify the barriers pupils face and improve the outcomes achieved by disadvantaged pupils.
- The vast majority of parents are positive about the school. Of the parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, 92% said that they would recommend the school to others. Parents told the inspector that their children are happy at school and that staff are always welcoming. A typical response from Parent View stated: 'I am extremely happy with the school in every aspect. I have had great responses from the head and teachers whenever I have had queries or worries. My children are progressing extremely well educationally and socially.'

### **Governance of the school**

- Governance is a strength of the school. The knowledgeable and experienced chair leads a dedicated, insightful and well-trained governing body. Governors have sought and benefited from effective external support.
- Strategic decisions are focused well on improving teaching and learning. As a result, resources are deployed efficiently. The governors have a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of how well pupils are doing and how this is linked to the quality of teaching.
- Governors ensure that all pay awards for staff are linked to performance management targets. Governors are aware of how pupil premium resources are deployed and of whether the actions taken to ensure these pupils achieve well are effective.
- Safeguarding is a key priority. Governors are meticulous in carrying out their statutory responsibilities. They gain further insight into the school's work through a range of activities including distributing awards at assemblies and attending parents' meetings.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school site is safe and secure. All visitors to the school are welcomed through the secure entrance, their credentials are checked and the school provides information about the safeguarding procedures to visitors.
- The school's single central record of employment checks meets statutory requirements. Leaders and governors regularly check that it is up to date. Safer recruitment

procedures are followed to ensure that only suitable people are employed to work with children. All other records including training logs are well maintained and updated regularly.

- The school's child protection policy is thorough. Staff act swiftly and appropriately to address any concerns. Records are comprehensive and well organised. Staff and governors receive regular and comprehensive safeguarding training. They have all had training on the 'Prevent' duty and their responsibilities regarding pupils in vulnerable situations.
- Pupils, especially those in key stage 2, are well aware of the importance of e-safety. They are able to discuss how the school supports them in keeping safe online, including how to avoid and tackle cyber bullying.

### Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

**Good**

- The quality of teaching is now good throughout the school. Inconsistencies noted at the last inspection have been addressed and pupils are suitably challenged in their learning.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is good. This, coupled with clear explanations, enables pupils to deepen their knowledge and understanding. For example, in a Year 5 and 6 science lesson pupils, inspired by the teacher's enthusiasm for science, challenge themselves to explore topics further. They learned and used the correct scientific vocabulary for their work. One pupil remarked, while conducting an experiment on refraction, that science is 'literally magic'.
- Throughout the school there is a culture of high expectations underpinned by the consistent use of agreed policies. Staff meet the range of learning needs in their classes effectively. All staff have a very good knowledge of pupils' needs and together work hard to meet them.
- Many pupils demonstrate a 'can do' approach to their learning which helps them succeed. Their positive attitudes are supported by the very good relationships that exist throughout the school between adults and pupils.
- Teachers regularly use links to prior learning to deepen understanding. For instance in a Year 3 class, pupils were challenged to write poetry using their learning from a previous lesson on using antonyms and synonyms.
- Pupils' books, and displays around the school, demonstrate good opportunities for extended writing across a range of subjects. The standard of presentation is generally good; however, there is still some inconsistency in the quality of pupils' handwriting.
- Pupils' progress in phonics has improved. The introduction of focused teaching in the early years, coupled with the effective and engaging teaching of phonics in Years 1 and 2, means that more pupils are successful in achieving the expected standard in the phonics screening checks.
- Pupils are encouraged to read widely and have access to their class and school libraries. The school 'book week' provides opportunities for pupils to engage

with a wide range of books and authors. Most pupils read regularly at home and say they enjoy reading. Some of the older pupils are not supported to develop their comprehension skills sufficiently well.

- Catch-up lessons are planned by leaders, teachers and support staff. The impact of the additional support is closely monitored. The school utilises external support and guidance effectively.
- Some pupils are unable to solve mathematical problems quickly and accurately because they do not use their calculation skills readily or recall number facts efficiently. Teachers are starting to provide pupils with opportunities to develop their reasoning skills in mathematics and to consolidate their understanding by using a range of practical resources. However, these improvements are too recent to have impacted on pupils' progress.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe. Older pupils spoke confidently about e-safety and described how the school regularly reminds them how to stay safe.
- The vast majority of parents said they are confident that leaders have strategies in place to keep their children safe and to promote their well-being.
- The outdoor education provided for pupils is universally popular. It provides pupils with good opportunities for personal and social development, including practical challenges and team-building exercises, as well as first-hand experiences of the natural world.
- The school's values underpin school life; adults model them daily. Pupils understand what is expected of them and demonstrate the values in their positive behaviour towards adults and each other. Leaders' inclusive approach and their promotion of pupils' well-being have created a positive climate for learning in which pupils thrive and develop confidence as learners.
- Vulnerable pupils are known to staff and appropriate but sensitive structures are in place to support their welfare and to address any concerns.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Pupils respond quickly to instructions and learning time is used efficiently. Part of the school's 'embedding good practice' improvement plan is that 'no learning time is lost'. Pupils start lessons promptly and, when returning from breaks and assemblies, start their work immediately.

- Engaging teaching means that pupils develop positive attitudes to learning. Occasionally, when the pace of the lesson slows or there are insufficient resources to share, levels of engagement are lower.
- Pupils have a good understanding of what bullying means and of the different types of bullying. They say that trusted adults are available to them. Everyone has someone to talk to if they need to and no one feels left out.
- Attendance is in line with that found nationally. No group of pupils currently in the school is disadvantaged by poor attendance. Fixed-term exclusions are low.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

**Good**

- The published outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics for key stage 2 in 2016 were well below those attained by other pupils nationally. However, from their different starting points all groups of pupils currently in the school are making good and often better than expected progress.
- Half-termly progress meetings identify any pupils who may be falling behind and need additional support. The resulting carefully planned interventions and focused teaching are effective.
- Overall outcomes for Year 1 pupils in the phonics screening check have been below average for the past two years. However, pupils make good progress from their starting points. By the end of Year 2, pupils have caught up and all pupils attain the expected standard.
- At the end of key stage 1 in 2016, pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at the expected standard and at greater depth matched that of all pupils nationally.
- Pupils who enter the school at other than the normal entry time in Reception are quickly assessed and their learning needs are identified. Support is put in place so these pupils make good progress.
- Teachers identify the needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and use personalised plans to ensure they are supported well. As a result, pupils make similar progress to other pupils nationally.
- Disadvantaged pupils also have individual plans to support their learning and their progress is closely monitored. As a result of this careful monitoring and of well-targeted support, disadvantaged pupils make good progress.
- All pupils, including the most able, have opportunities to challenge themselves through the choice of activities provided in lessons. As a result of this and the well-planned learning opportunities, the most able pupils make good progress.

### **Early years provision**

**Good**

- The early years provision is well led and managed. The team create a positive learning environment which nurtures and engages the children. The children play and work cooperatively.

- Most children now enter Reception with skills at typical levels for their age. Ongoing assessment is used to support children's learning well. As a result children make good progress.
- Both indoor and outdoor learning environments are bright and stimulating and encourage good language development. Displays, including those about phonics, are child friendly and are easily accessible so they support children's learning.
- The curriculum is planned well and is engaging. All areas of learning are taught effectively. As a result children are well prepared for Year 1. Standards have continued to improve in recent years, and the majority of current pupils are now on track to achieve a good level of development.
- The teaching of early reading skills is a strength. The teaching of phonics is now more effective and most children are able to use their phonic knowledge to read simple texts. The most able children are given books that allow them to expand their vocabulary and their understanding of the text. The teaching of early writing skills is less well focused. As a result pupils make slower progress in this area.
- Leaders actively encourage parental involvement. Partnerships with parents are very strong. All parents who spoke to the inspector were overwhelmingly positive about how happy and settled their children are in the school.
- The early years leader has established effective links with pre-school providers. Opportunities to share good practice and prepare the children for transition are well established. When children start Reception, they and their families are well supported.
- The outdoor education provision is an excellent resource. Children's personal, social and emotional development and their physical skills are enhanced through a range of practical activities. Parents support the weekly outdoor events as volunteers. Staff are vigilant during these opportunities. They are well trained and safeguarding is effective.



## School details

Unique reference number	115127
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10023352

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 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	110
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue Haggerwood-Bullen
Headteacher	Helen Coop
Telephone number	01279 812362
Website	<a href="http://www.birchanger.essex.sch.uk">www.birchanger.essex.sch.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:admin@birchanger.essex.sch.uk">admin@birchanger.essex.sch.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	11–12 February 2015

## Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school is smaller than the average primary school. There are currently three single-aged and two mixed-aged classes. The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils who are supported by the pupil premium is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average.
- In 2015 the school met the government's current floor targets, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 6.

- Children in the early years (Reception class) attend full time.
- There have been a number of staff changes since the last inspection. New subject and middle leaders have been appointed. A new special educational needs leader was appointed in September 2016.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching and learning in eight lessons and attended a whole-school assembly. Five observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, middle leaders and other members of the school staff. Meetings were also held with three members of the governing body and a local authority representative.
- The inspector checked the school's website, observed the work of the school and considered a range of documents including: the school's self-evaluation; minutes of governors' meetings; records of behaviour, attendance and safeguarding; school improvement plans; information about pupil progress and monitoring and evaluation summaries. The inspector undertook a joint work scrutiny with the headteacher of writing and mathematics at key stage 2, as well as looking at topic books. Work samples were considered from the early years, key stage 1 pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The inspector met with a group of pupils. Other pupils were spoken to during lessons and at breaktime. The 45 pupils' responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire were also considered. Pupils' behaviour in lessons, as well as before school and during breaktime, was observed by the inspector. The inspector listened to pupils read in class as well as a small group of pupils from key stage 1 and key stage 2.
- The inspector took account of the 45 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and also considered comments provided by text message. The inspector spoke informally to parents at the start of the day, and reviewed the school's own survey of parents. The responses to the staff questionnaire completed by 18 staff members were also considered.

## Inspection team

Liz Chaplin, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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