

# Birchwood Nursery School

Birchway, Crawford Road, Hatfield, Hertfordshire AL10 0PD

## Inspection dates

9–10 March 2017

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Outstanding</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Outstanding</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Outstanding</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Outstanding</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an outstanding school

- The school continues to provide children with an outstanding start to their education, and to prepare them very well for their next school.
- The school successfully meets its stated aim to put 'children at the heart of everything we do'.
- The headteacher's enthusiasm and ambition for children drive the school forward. The pre-school manager, other staff and governors share her vision and dedication.
- From starting points below those typical for their age, children make outstanding progress.
- All groups of children are very effectively supported and guided to make strong progress from their starting points. Some disadvantaged children could do better still, but they miss a lot of school.
- Children thrive and feel safe. They know they can turn to their key person, or any adult, if they are worried.
- Staff know how to get the best out of their children. Staff morale is very high. They know that they are part of a very effective team making a positive difference to children's lives.
- Accurate assessment information enables teachers to plan for children's next steps in their learning. Most of the next steps, but not all, clearly tell adults how best to support children to make good progress.
- The interesting activities, and the imaginative ways staff present them, arouse children's curiosity and thirst for learning.
- The relationship with parents is very strong. Staff provide some useful opportunities for parents to find out how to help their children at home. Parents said that this is very helpful. While an excellent start, more opportunities exist to build on this further.

## Full report

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

- Ensure that all adults working with children are clear about the next steps in learning for each child they support.
- Seek to build further on the strong relationship with parents to benefit their children's education by:
  - stressing the importance of their children's full attendance to parents of disadvantaged children
  - providing more information to parents to enable them to support learning out of school even better.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Outstanding

- The headteacher's drive and ambition for the school have ensured that the many strengths identified by the previous inspection have been maintained, and further improvements made.
- The pre-school manager, other leaders, staff and governors share the headteacher's strong commitment. All staff responding to their survey agreed that the school has improved since the last inspection. Teamwork among staff is outstanding. Everyone knows what is expected of them, and what they can expect from their colleagues.
- The headteacher ensures that everyone has a voice in making the nursery school better and better. Every year, staff and governors come together to review what has gone well and what they feel needs further improvement. Parents' views are sought. Staff take account of children's thoughts, too. As a result, once improvements are identified, a common shared energy drives them forward.
- The headteacher knows the school intimately. She 'walks' the school daily so her finger is always on the pulse of the school. One member of staff said, 'The headteacher always shows a great deal of interest and acknowledges all successes, big and small.'
- Leaders' regular and rigorous checks on the quality of teaching and learning lead to high-quality training. Staff want to improve. There is no complacency. Staff morale is high because they know that the headteacher will support them. There is a culture of 'growing your own' staff in the 'Birchwood Way'.
- Teamwork is outstanding. Staff benefit from working alongside one another, sharing ideas and expertise. Since the previous inspection, the nursery and pre-school have amalgamated. As a result, staff work in both. This is highly beneficial to children's learning because staff have a comprehensive understanding of both settings.
- The role of key person (worker) is pivotal. While children know that they can talk to any adult, they look first and foremost for their special person. Parents know that this is the person keeping a particularly close eye on their child and this strong relationship contributes to children's happiness and development.
- Accurate assessments enable staff quickly to spot any child falling behind and ensure that they receive the help they need to catch up.
- The excellent curriculum fully meets the needs of children. Each and every opportunity is taken to arouse children's interest and broaden their knowledge. Staff engender a love of learning by presenting activities in unusual and imaginative ways. During the inspection, for example, children and adults crawled under a transparent tabletop to watch giant African snails move. Children's excellent concentration led to perceptive observations, their understanding deepened further by staff's probing questions.
- Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. Regular visits from creatures such as chickens and owls give children a sense of awe and wonder. British values are practised in the everyday life of the school. For example, children respect and value one another, their school and the equipment they play with.
- The school's highly inclusive approach results in outstanding support and guidance for

children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The provision is managed extremely well. Additional funds are used effectively. Children benefit from the high level of training given to all staff so they are able to cater for a wide range of needs.

- Leaders' highly effective use of additional early years pupil premium funding ensures that the vast majority of disadvantaged children, including those who are most able, flourish. For example, a high proportion of these children benefit from extra speech and language sessions, closely linked to their needs and interests.
- Excellent links with outside agencies and the local authority are highly beneficial. The school is a 'hub' for specialist services. For example, parents of children who have autistic spectrum disorder benefit from practical advice on how to support their children.
- The outstanding relationship with parents is the foundation of much of the school's success. Every parent responding to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, would recommend the nursery to another parent. A response, typical of many, was, 'I'm super happy with everything!'
- The school does much to help parents play a full and active part in their children's education. Information sessions, such as advice on teaching phonics, are well received. However, parents would benefit from information on other aspects of school life, such as the school's approach to teaching and learning.
- The local authority recognises the leadership skills of the headteacher and other members of staff. In their different roles, staff offer support, guidance and training through a local teaching school and children's centres.

## **Governance of the school**

- Governance is highly effective. Despite changes in individual governors and school staff, governors have guided the school to remain outstanding for more than a decade.
- Members of the governing body visit the school regularly, so they see what is going on for themselves. They compare what they see with the information given to them by school leaders, and ask searching questions if the two seem not to match.
- Governors ensure that children's interests are always at the forefront of their thinking when making decisions.
- Governors check regularly to see that additional funding, including the early years pupil premium, is making a positive difference for children.
- Governors oversee the performance of staff, including the headteacher, closely.
- Governors ensure that all statutory responsibilities, including those relating to safeguarding, are met.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The headteacher and governors have successfully created a culture that ensures that children's safety and safeguarding are at the forefront of all adults' thinking.

- Key staff use a 'real-time' secure online system to record all relevant information and ensure that everyone has the information they need at their fingertips.
- Leaders ensure that training, such as in child protection and the 'Prevent' duty, is up to date. As a result, all staff have a very good awareness of what to look for in order to keep children safe.
- Staff said that they are confident in raising any concerns. The procedures for this are clear and followed rigorously.
- Every parent responding to the online survey agreed that their children feel safe in school, and four in every five strongly agreed.
- Excellent links with the local children's centre and other outside agencies enable staff to seek extra help quickly and support families in difficulty.
- Checks on the suitability of staff, governors, volunteers and contractors are thorough and meticulous. Documentation is comprehensive and detailed.

### Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

### Outstanding

- Positive, trusting relationships between children and staff ensure that learning flows smoothly. On the numerous occasions when children are excited by an activity, they invariably respond immediately when the adult asks them for quiet attention.
- In their own behaviour, adults model the attitudes, values and behaviour they expect from the children. For their part, children respond positively.
- Adults arouse children's inquisitiveness and draw them into learning. They use any and every opportunity to engage them. All staff responding to their survey stated that they are encouraged to innovate in ways that are right for children. For example, staff decided to reorganise children into 'challenge groups' for adult-led sessions, so that they learn with children of similar ability.
- Checks on one day's learning are used highly effectively to plan activities for the next day. As a result, there is a clear vision for the progress of each child. However, sometimes this is not communicated to all adults contributing to the child's learning.
- Adults know and understand how children learn. A particular skill of staff is knowing when to give children time to try and figure things out, and when to intervene.
- Staff constantly look to promote children's speaking and listening skills. Staff's skilful use of signing gives all children, but particularly those with limited English, a visual cue linked to key vocabulary. Simple songs and rhymes, too, are a regular feature. A parent said, 'Every day he comes home and teaches me a new song.'
- Children look forward to the daily routine of sharing a story. They join in enthusiastically with repeated lines, especially if they are accompanied by actions. The most able read simple texts, and use phonics to sound out words.
- Staff promote children's early writing skills very effectively. Activities will often have something such as a whiteboard close by for children to record their thoughts. Staff entice those reluctant to write with anything that grabs their interest. In one case during the inspection, a reluctant writer drew shapes on a balloon.
- Staff take every opportunity to foster children's understanding of number and

associated language. During the inspection, children in one class explored boxes of different sizes, one big enough to crawl in, using language such as 'bigger than' and 'biggest'.

- Staff work very closely with parents. One of the benefits of 'Fun Friday', when parents stay and play with their children, is that staff model different ideas for parents to try at home. More formal information sessions, for example in how to teach phonics, explain in simple, straightforward language how parents can help. The way staff offer parents tips to use with their children at home is an improvement since the last inspection.

## **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

**Outstanding**

### **Personal development and welfare**

- The school's work to promote children's personal development and welfare is outstanding. Every parent responding to their online survey agreed that their child is happy at school, and a very high proportion – nine in every 10 – strongly agreed.
- Children's thirst for knowledge is infectious. They arrive each morning or afternoon, keen and eager to find out what new learning awaits them. They want to learn, partly because it is so much fun.
- Children love to take responsibility. From the very youngest, they register themselves, initially recognising their photograph, and later their name. They willingly tidy up and enjoy carrying messages. On Fridays, they lead the learning, showing their parents what new knowledge they have acquired.
- Parents responding to the survey and spoken to by inspectors agreed that their children's personal development is excellent. A typical comment was, 'Since my children attended this nursery they have really blossomed and grown.'
- Positive relationships between children and staff, and the caring culture of the school, ensure that children know that they will be listened to should they have any worries or concerns.
- Children understand how to stay safe. At an age-appropriate level, they are developing an understanding of 'risk', and how to manage it. Staff use discussion very effectively to develop children's understanding of staying safe. Parents receive helpful advice about keeping their children safe online.
- Transition between classes and between the pre-school and nursery is good. The fact that staff work in both buildings helps this. Staff know what children have done previously or will do next. Children know all of the staff. Parents say that transition when children leave and go to school is very smooth as well.

### **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of children is outstanding. Every parent responding to the online survey agreed that the school makes sure its children are well behaved, and the vast majority agreed that the school deals effectively with bullying.
- As soon as they join, children quickly learn the school's values because staff promote them through discussion and in their own actions. Key to children's excellent behaviour is adults' consistently high expectations. From the start, routines are established,

boundaries set and golden rules such as 'I can share and take turns' explained.

- Children's exemplary behaviour, whether playing alone or with others, epitomises the harmonious community. At snack and lunchtime, for example, children sit with their friends, share, take turns and exchange ideas about what they have learned.
- Children's pride in their school is self-evident. They treat equipment with great care and willingly join in to tidy up.
- Most families bring children to school regularly. Attendance is checked frequently and swift action taken to help struggling families, often with the help of the children's centre. Even so, attendance of many disadvantaged children is much lower than others and the school's information shows that this has an adverse impact on their achievement.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

### **Outstanding**

- From starting points often below those typical for their age, children make outstanding progress in all areas of learning.
- Work in children's learning journals and the school's information about progress show that children currently in the school continue to make outstanding progress overall.
- At the start of the school year, the staff focus on getting the foundation right, particularly children's physical development, communication and language skills and personal, social and emotional development. Outstanding progress in key skills such as literacy and numeracy follows and quickens during the remaining weeks and terms.
- Children who speak English as an additional language settle quickly and thrive. Key words are taught quickly. Many staff know basic words in other languages and quickly build a rapport with these children, who feel at home.
- Children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities do well and often make rapid gains in learning. For example, one parent explained how her child quickly developed: 'My child is on the spectrum and went from a non-verbal child to a child talking in full sentences.'
- Disadvantaged children who attend well make progress similar to their peers. However, a small proportion attend far less well. This has a negative impact on the rate of their learning.
- A particular strength is the children's knowledge and understanding of the world. This is because learning includes numerous opportunities, such as 'International Week,' when parents visit and share their many different cultures and traditions.
- Above all else, through imaginative activities presented in innovative ways, the school succeeds in its aim to start children on the path to become 'highly motivated lifelong learners'.

## School details

Unique reference number	117069
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10003531

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	Nursery
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	2 to 5
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	205
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Susan Jones
Headteacher	Kathryn Evans
Telephone number	01707 262 648
Website	<a href="http://www.birchwoodnursery.herts.sch.uk">www.birchwoodnursery.herts.sch.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:admin@birchwoodnursery.herts.sch.uk">admin@birchwoodnursery.herts.sch.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	29–30 January 2013

## Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school is smaller than an average-sized primary school.
- Children can start in pre-school from their second birthday.
- There is one learning group in the pre-school and two in the nursery.
- Roughly half the children are from White British backgrounds. Of the remainder, the largest group are those of any other White background.
- Approximately one quarter of children speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of children supported by pupil premium funding is below average. The overall proportion of children who receive support for their special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average.



- The nursery school is open during term time and operates before- and after-school care five days a week during this time.
- At other times, childcare provision is offered during the holidays, 8am until 6pm, five days a week, for an extra 11 weeks a year. The centre is closed for two weeks every year.
- The school is currently drawing up plans to offer 30-hour provision.
- The nursery school is the lead agency for Hatfield Children’s Centre Group.
- Since the previous inspection, Birchwood Nursery School and The Birches Daycare have amalgamated.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspectors visited all classrooms. Some visits were conducted jointly with the headteacher or the pre-school manager. In addition, the inspectors observed small groups of children being taught.
- The inspectors looked at work in children's books (learning journals) and listened to children read.
- The inspectors observed children in other activities and as they moved around the school and site.
- The inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, the pre-school manager, other leaders, teachers, other staff and governors. Inspectors also spoke with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspectors asked children about their experiences at school.
- The views of 52 parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account. The inspectors also held informal discussions with parents. The inspectors considered the views of 31 members of staff who responded to their survey. No children responded.
- The inspectors looked at a range of school documents and information. These included the school's development plan, checks on the quality of teaching, curriculum plans, minutes of meetings of the governing body and children's behaviour and attendance records. The inspectors also looked at arrangements for safeguarding procedures, including relevant records.

## Inspection team

Robert Greatrex, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Simon Webb	Her Majesty's Inspector
Tania Perry	Ofsted Inspector

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