

Inspection of Birch Church of England Voluntary-Aided Primary School

School Hill, Birch, Colchester, Essex CO2 0LZ

Inspection dates: 3–4 December 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at Birch Church of England School live the school values of 'wisdom, trust and friendship'. Pupils love coming to school, attend well and enjoy learning. Pupils told inspectors that staff are kind and understanding. One pupil summed up the views of many, commenting: 'Teachers explain things really well and, if you don't get it, they help you.'

Pupils are well-cared for. Senior leaders and governors do everything they can to support pupils' well-being. There are many after-school clubs. Pupils enjoy the opportunity to learn new sports or create dance routines.

Pupils' behaviour is exceptional. Staff go out of their way to support pupils. Pupils have respect for all adults. Lessons are interesting, so pupils want to learn. Pupils feel safe at school. They told inspectors that everyone is kind. There is hardly any falling out. Bullying of any kind is rare because it is not tolerated by staff and pupils.

Parents speak highly of the school. Most parents are pleased their children attend the school. They value the meetings after school when they are shown how to help their children learn. Parents think that, 'The ethos of the school is stunning. Children come running into school each morning because they enjoy it so much.'

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Pupils access a wide-ranging and rich curriculum that supports them to be well prepared for secondary school by the end of Year 6. Although results vary year-on-year, in 2019 pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 achieved well above other children nationally in reading, writing and mathematics.

Senior leaders and staff are a strong team. Senior leaders have reviewed most curriculum subjects since the previous inspection. Subject leaders have good knowledge and understanding of their subjects. Curriculum plans are effective in supporting teachers to plan effective lessons. This is helping pupils to know and understand more in each subject over time.

Adults take good care of pupils in the early years. Most children settle in quickly and are keen to learn. The early years leader organises the curriculum well. Most children reach the expected standard by the end of their Reception Year and are ready to move into Year 1.

Reading is given a high priority in the school, and pupils generally enjoy opportunities to read and hear stories. The teaching of phonics is not helping some individual pupils to read as effectively as they could, particularly a few children in Reception. This is because they are accessing activities that are too easy for them. On occasion, readers in Key Stage 1 and 2 who need help to catch up are not confident to use their phonics knowledge to read new words.

Leaders' monitoring of, and pupils' access to, the curriculum is underdeveloped in some areas. Subject leaders' work to monitor and develop the curriculum is more advanced in key stage 2 than in key stage 1.

The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) does not get many opportunities to visit lessons to check on how pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are accessing the curriculum. This is in contrast to her strong work with parents and external experts, where she is seeking the best help to meet pupils' needs.

Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage in their education and for life in modern Britain. Pupils are keen to take on special jobs as they go through the school. All Year 6 take part in the 'young leaders' programme, in which they lead or take part in community projects.

Staff say that their well-being is paramount to senior leaders and governors. Senior leaders do everything they can to give staff time to carry out necessary tasks to fulfil their roles effectively.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Senior leaders, staff and governors do everything they can to make sure pupils are safe. Safeguarding systems are checked termly by the safeguarding governor. School leaders work with the local authority to undertake additional checks on their safeguarding systems. This is because leaders want to make sure they are doing all they can to safeguard their pupils.

Staff know what to do if they have any concerns about a pupil. Senior leaders are tenacious. They make sure that external agencies follow up any concerns that the school raises.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Senior leaders need to review the school's approach to teaching phonics so that it meets the precise and individual needs of pupils in areas where it is not currently doing so, for example for those children ready to develop reading at a greater pace in Reception and for those pupils that need to catch up in key stage 1 and 2.
- Senior leaders need to make sure there are enough opportunities for subject leaders, including the SENCo, to visit lessons and check that all curriculum subjects are developing securely for pupils in the school, most notably in the wider curriculum in key stage 1.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you're not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	115138
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10114240
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	5 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	147
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Tony Coppin
Headteacher	Revd Catherine Moore
Website	www.birch.essex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	28–29 November 2013

Information about this school

- Four new staff members have joined the school since the previous inspection.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We deemed the inspection a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

- During this inspection, we held meetings with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the SENCo and support staff. We met with the subject leaders for early years, English, mathematics, computing, history, science and music. I also met with the office administrator who manages the single central record.
- I met with members of the governing body, including the chair, and representatives from the local authority and Chelmsford Diocesan Education Board.
- The subjects of reading, mathematics, computing, music, science and history were considered as part of this inspection. We spoke to curriculum leaders, visited lessons, looked at a range of pupils' work and met with teachers and pupils. We visited phonics lessons, heard pupils read and visited reading lessons.

- Alongside leaders, we looked at a sample of pupils' books from different year groups and across a range of subjects to evaluate pupils' learning in mathematics, science, history and computing.
- We spoke to pupils about their experiences of school life and their learning to find out what it is like to be a pupil at Birch Voluntary-Aided Primary School. We also observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and during breaktime and lunchtime.
- We considered the views of parents gathered at the beginning of the first day of the inspection.
- We scrutinised a wide range of documents, including those related to curriculum planning and development, safeguarding, behaviour, attendance, exclusions, the school's evaluation of its own performance, the school's development plans and the local authorities work to support the school.

Inspection team

Julie Winyard, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Stephen Cloke

Ofsted Inspector

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