

Inspection of Birchwood CofE Primary School

Admirals Road, Birchwood, Warrington, Cheshire WA3 6QG

Inspection dates: 22–23 January 2020

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Early years provision **Good**

Previous inspection grade Good

What is it like to attend this school?

The new headteacher has transformed this school. Pupils now get a good deal. They are at the heart of everything that the school does. Pupils feel safe and are happy. They skip into school at the start of the school day with happy, smiley faces. Pupils share warm and caring relationships with staff. They told me that they know that staff are there to help them if they have any worries or concerns. Staff are ambitious for all pupils. Teachers strive to make learning interesting and fun.

Pupils behave well and respect people's differences. They move around the school in a sensible manner and make visitors to the school feel welcome. Most pupils are kind to each other. Pupils told me that if bullying occurs, teachers deal with it swiftly.

Pupils contribute to decision making in the school through their roles as school councillors. Older pupils also act as buddies to children in the early years. Pupils access a wide range of after-school clubs. These are well attended by all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged.

The majority of parents and carers think highly of the school. They typically commented: 'My child is thriving since the new headteacher took over. I have seen many positive changes. I trust the school and would strongly recommend it to others.'

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

The improvements that the new headteacher has made in a short period of time are remarkable. She has restructured the staff team and invested heavily in their professional development. As a result, pupils are now achieving well across a range of subjects. Leaders recognise the need to build on this success to ensure that these recent improvements are sustained over time.

The curriculum is rich and varied. Leaders and governors have thought carefully about what they want pupils to learn. Many subjects are well planned and sequenced, including mathematics, science, and art and design. Systems to monitor these subjects are effective. However, procedures to check how well pupils are achieving in physical education (PE), modern foreign languages and music are less well developed. Children are keen to learn and poor behaviour rarely disrupts learning.

Leaders make sure that the teaching of reading is given high priority. Teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic. They focus on developing pupils' fluency and understanding. They also work on increasing the words that pupils know. Pupils have access to high-quality texts. Many of these books deepen their knowledge of other subjects. However, leaders recognise that more could be done to raise the profile of reading in the learning environment across the school.

Phonics is taught right from the start. Younger pupils confidently use their phonics knowledge to sound out unfamiliar words. Books are closely matched to the sounds that pupils have learned. Effective support is given to pupils who are struggling with reading to ensure that they catch up quickly. In 2019, the proportion of pupils who reached the expected standard in the phonics screening check was above the national average.

Pupils are confident speakers and talked to us enthusiastically about their learning. Year 6 pupils were able to clearly articulate, using precise scientific language, how the work they had previously done on inheritance linked to current work on evolution and adaptation. Pupils in Year 2 confidently explained how they had worked out a money problem. Both of these examples demonstrate that pupils know more and remember more.

Children achieve well in the early years. The learning environment is well organised and resourced. Children have ample room to move around freely and play in comfort. Staff take every opportunity to develop children's language and mathematical skills. However, more needs to be done to strengthen the partnership with parents in the early years.

Leaders have ensured that pupils with special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are included in all aspects of school life. Staff work well with external agencies to ensure that the needs of pupils with SEND are met.

Pupils have high aspirations. Some talked to us about their desire to go on to further education and to become teachers and authors. They clearly understand that to achieve their goals they must attend school on a regular basis. Since the last inspection, attendance has improved. The proportion of pupils who attend school on a regular basis and is now broadly in line with the national average.

Pupils learn about different faiths and cultures. This helps them appreciate the diversity of the world in which they live. They also access some exciting trips to broaden their experiences beyond the local area. The school pays due regard to pupils' physical and mental health.

Staff are very proud to work at the school and morale is high. Teachers appreciate that leaders do all they can to ensure that they have a good work-life balance.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Keeping children safe is a central part of the school's work. Leaders and governors ensure that all staff appointed at the school are suitable to work with children. Staff have a very secure understanding of how to keep children safe. All staff have received training in child protection so that they are able to identify the early signs of abuse or neglect. This training is updated regularly. Staff understand that safeguarding children's welfare is everyone's responsibility.

Children have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe when online. The school works well with other agencies to ensure that vulnerable children and their families receive appropriate professional support for their needs.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The new headteacher has turned around the fortunes of the school in a short period of time. Evidence gathered at inspection shows that pupils in the school are achieving well across a range of subjects. However, these improvements are recent. Leaders need to ensure that these improvements are embedded and sustained over time.
- Subjects leaders for music, PE and modern foreign languages do not make detailed checks to make sure that curriculum plans are working in practice. As a result, they do not have a secure understanding of how well pupils are achieving in these subjects. Leaders need to ensure that monitoring arrangements for these subjects are of the same high quality as evident in other areas of the curriculum, such as science, mathematics, and art and design.
- The learning environment across the school does not promote a real love of reading. Leaders should ensure that reading is given a higher profile within the environment. This will ensure that pupils take an even greater interest in becoming avid readers.
- The school's partnership with parents in the early years is not strong. As a result, some parents do not take an active part in their children's learning. Leaders need to think of more innovative ways of engaging with parents, particularly those who are harder to reach.

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 are the school and you are 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	111304
Local authority	Warrington
Inspection number	10087916
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	218
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Penny Johnson
Headteacher	Siobhan Bentley
Website	www.birchwoodceprimary.co.uk/
Date of previous inspection	19–20 May 2015, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- A new headteacher and chair of governors have been appointed since the last inspection.
- The school's last section 48 inspection was in January 2017.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- During the inspection, we held meetings with the headteacher, staff, governors and representatives from the local authority.
- I held a telephone conversation with a representative from the Diocese of Liverpool.
- We visited lessons in each key stage. We spoke with pupils at various times during the two days of the inspection.
- I listened to pupils read from Year 2 and Year 3.
- We observed behaviour around the school, on the playground and in lessons.

- We spoke with parents as they brought their children to school at the start of the school day.
- We held discussions with staff which focused on safeguarding. We also examined a range of documentation relating to safeguarding.
- We reviewed other documentation provided by the school, including behaviour logs, the school's plans for improvement and the single central record.
- We carried out deep dives into reading, mathematics, science, and art and design. Deep dives are the methodology by which inspectors identify why a subject is as it is. This entails discussions with subject leaders, visits to lessons, looking at examples of pupils' work, discussion with teachers and discussion with pupils.
- On the second day of the inspection, we also looked at wider aspects of the curriculum, such as PE, modern foreign languages and music.
- I considered the 41 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and read the free-text comments from parents. I also considered the eight responses to the staff questionnaire and the 20 responses to the pupil questionnaire.

Inspection team

Sheila Iwaskow, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Lynne Ryder

Ofsted Inspector

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