

# Inspection of Birchwood School

Birchwood Specialist Care and Education Services, Ainscough Road, Birchwood,  
Warrington, Cheshire WA3 7PW

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Inspection dates: 21 and 24 June 2022

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

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The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Not previously inspected

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils are happy and secure at this school. Most have experienced difficulties with their learning in the past. They see Birchwood School as a fresh start. Pupils feel welcome from the moment that they join the school. They like their bright, spacious classrooms and enjoy relaxing in the attractive grounds outdoors. They especially love the visits that they receive from the school's therapy dog, Loki.

Leaders and staff want pupils to succeed. Pupils try to live up to these high expectations. The relationships between pupils and staff are respectful and positive. Pupils listen carefully to adults. They get on with their work and complete their tasks. This helps pupils to move forward in their learning.

There are simple rules and routines for pupils to follow. For example, pupils know that they must not leave the classroom without an adult. Pupils follow these rules well. Classrooms and corridors are calm and orderly. Leaders have clear procedures in place to respond swiftly to any bullying should it ever occur. Pupils feel safe at school.

Pupils take part in a range of activities for their personal development. For example, they receive useful advice about possible careers. They also learn how to be independent. All of these experiences help pupils to develop independence in preparation for life beyond school.

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

Leaders have designed a broad and ambitious curriculum for pupils. All of the pupils at this school have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders have made sure that the curriculum meets the needs of these pupils.

Leaders have thought carefully about what they most want pupils to know and to be able to do by the time that they leave the school. They have organised the curriculum well so that pupils build their knowledge in a logical order. In almost all subjects, the curriculums contain the information that teachers need to be able to deliver the curriculum well. This ensures that pupils learn the essential knowledge that leaders have identified for them.

In a very small number of subjects, the curriculums do not contain enough information about all of the knowledge that pupils need to learn. This makes it more difficult for teachers to make sure that pupils are learning everything that they need to know.

Teachers know how to make learning interesting and enjoyable for pupils. This helps pupils to stay focused on their learning. Teachers make careful adaptations to activities to ensure that each pupil is able to learn well from the curriculum. Over time, pupils develop positive attitudes to their learning and disruption to lessons is rare. This helps pupils to learn well.

Pupils typically remember what they have learned. Teachers carry out a range of assessments to check for any knowledge that pupils might have missed. Occasionally, teachers do not check carefully enough that pupils' knowledge is secure before moving on to new learning. When this happens, pupils do not recall their learning easily.

Leaders have made reading a priority. Teachers are skilled at recognising when pupils have difficulties with reading. They provide extra support quickly to help these pupils to catch up. For example, teachers deliver a phonics programme for those who are at an early stage of reading. Leaders have also provided a wide range of interesting texts for pupils to read. These texts support pupils' learning in other subjects and supports them in learning to read well.

All pupils at the school have autistic spectrum disorder. Leaders work with staff to quickly identify any additional needs that pupils might have. Leaders communicate effectively with parents and carers and with a wide range of professionals. This ensures that pupils receive the extra support that they need to learn well.

Older pupils benefit from a strong programme of careers advice. This helps them to understand the choices available to them when they leave school. Pupils have plentiful opportunities to develop important skills for their future lives. For example, they learn how to plan a journey on public transport. They work out how much money to take to the shops to buy ingredients for cooking. Pupils learn in appropriate ways about a range of other cultures and faiths. They learn to appreciate difference and diversity, in readiness for life in modern Britain.

The proprietor and governors ensure that leaders consistently meet the independent school standards. For example, there is a health and safety policy and a range of risk assessments to ensure that the premises are safe for pupils, staff and visitors. The building is in a good state of repair and classrooms are bright and well-ventilated. Leaders comply with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. For example, there is an appropriate accessibility plan in place which is available to parents.

Staff are proud to work at the school. They appreciate the support that they receive from leaders with regard to their workload and well-being.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that new and existing staff receive regular safeguarding training. Staff know how to recognise potential signs of abuse or neglect. They report any concerns that they might have about the welfare of a pupil quickly.

Leaders have established strong working relationships with a wide range of agencies such as mental health services, early help and local authority children's services. This enables leaders to ensure that pupils and their families receive timely help if they need it.

Through the curriculum, pupils learn about the risks associated with social media and using the internet. Pupils know who to speak to if they have any worries.

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

### **(Information for the school and proprietor)**

- In a small number of subjects, the curriculums do not contain enough information about the essential knowledge that pupils need to learn. This makes it more difficult for teachers to make sure that pupils learn everything that they need to know. Leaders should ensure that teachers in all subjects are clear about the knowledge that pupils need to learn.
- On occasion, teachers do not check carefully enough that pupils' learning is secure before moving on to new learning. This prevents pupils from building up their knowledge as well as they should. Leaders should ensure that pupils' knowledge is secure before they move on to new learning.

## **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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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 provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	148566
<b>DfE registration number</b>	877/6014
<b>Local authority</b>	Warrington
<b>Inspection number</b>	10225764
<b>Type of school</b>	Other independent special school
<b>School category</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	8 to 18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Proprietor</b>	Birchwood Children's Services Ltd
<b>Chair</b>	Salman Ugardar
<b>Headteacher</b>	Deb Chappel
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£49,500 to £81,000
<b>Telephone number</b>	01925 202448
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.bwchildservices.com">www.bwchildservices.com</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:deb.chappel@bwchildservices.com">deb.chappel@bwchildservices.com</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- The school was registered by the DfE on 22 June 2021. This was the first standard inspection of the school.
- Leaders do not make use of any alternative provision.
- The school caters for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder.
- The proprietor body has applied to the DfE to register and open part of the building as a children's home.

## Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other leaders. The lead inspector also spoke to the school's external adviser on the telephone.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and personal, social, health and economic education. For each deep dive inspectors met with subject leaders, discussed the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects with leaders and pupils.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation about safeguarding. Inspectors also spoke with staff to understand how they keep pupils safe.
- Inspectors spoke with school leaders, viewed parts of the school's premises and looked at a range of documentation to check for compliance with the independent school standards.
- Inspectors considered the views expressed by parents and carers in their responses to Ofsted Parent View. This included free-text comments.
- Inspectors considered the response to Ofsted's survey for staff. Inspectors also spoke with some pupils about school life. There were no responses to the pupil survey.

- Inspectors spoke with staff to discuss leaders' support for their workload and well-being.

### **Inspection team**

Mavis Smith, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Mark Quinn

Her Majesty's Inspector

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