

Inspection of an outstanding school: Birchwood Nursery School

Birchway, Crawford Road, Hatfield, Hertfordshire AL10 0PD

Inspection dates:

29 and 30 November 2022

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The next inspection will therefore be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Children are happy and safe. They settle quickly into school life. They feel comfortable because staff provide them with a great deal of attention and care. Children grow in confidence where staff teach them to be independent. This includes with self-care, be it children cleaning their hands or collecting the cutlery they need to eat a healthy snack.

Children learn quickly from staff about turn-taking and sharing. Over time, children progress from playing alongside each other to playing with a friend. Kind, polite behaviour is the norm. It means bullying seldom occurs. If a child does behave unkindly, they receive caring, patient support from staff. This helps children to learn how to manage their feelings so they may focus on enjoying their learning and play.

Because staff celebrate their efforts, children are typically keen to have a go at activities. For instance, they climb up a frame and jump off bravely and safely, strengthening their muscles.

Children gain lots from the carefully planned outdoor learning. They learn about fire safety and how to prepare food hygienically. Children's vocabulary about the natural world grows because staff explain words clearly. Staff use the sounds words make to help children remember them. Experiencing nature first-hand helps children to develop a sense of awe and wonder about the world.

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

Leaders, including governors, have a secure understanding about what makes high-quality learning in the early years. They have created a new curriculum that sets out what they want children to achieve. Staff involved in creating the curriculum can identify the smaller steps of learning that help children progress. These staff engage in careful

questioning and high-quality conversations with children. This helps staff to assess how well children are learning. Staff use this assessment to inform what they do next. For example, they may rephrase an explanation or repeat a demonstration.

However, some staff have a less well-developed understanding of how to deliver the curriculum effectively. They are not well trained in how to use questioning and vocabulary to develop children's understanding and communication. For instance, they may ask a child a series of questions, making it difficult for the child to focus and respond. The response the staff member hopes to achieve does not then materialise.

Staff work closely with parents, carers and external services to support children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). However, children do not always get the precise support they need in school. For example, some children use alternative communication systems. Leaders do not specify how staff should plan for children's use of these systems, so staff do not have a clear understanding about how to help children with SEND communicate as quickly as they could.

There is much to praise in the revised reading programme. Leaders carefully selected storybooks they want children to know. Staff read these aloud using an expressive voice, which captures children's interest. Being interested in books prepares children for learning the sounds letters make. Creative staff set storybooks to music. This helps children to remember key events and vocabulary. Parents receive helpful guidance linked to the storybooks children read. It gives them ideas about activities they may do at home. These activities help develop children's spoken language.

Leaders oversee a wide range of positive experiences for children, from calming yoga classes to visits from travelling farms and theatre companies. These broaden children's horizons, giving them the confidence to try new things.

Leaders and their staff support children to behave well. Staff make expectations known through consistent routines. Over time, these develop children's independence and ability to build relationships, for instance by helping children to manage toileting or to help their friends fasten their coats.

Governors take a hands-on approach to assure themselves that leaders and staff know what to do next to further improve the school. Parents feel happy to recommend the school to other parents. Dedicated staff help one another, aiming to do their best for the children. Leaders cultivate a school community where adults and children typically feel supported. This puts leaders in a welcome position to effect the necessary change.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders, including governors, make safeguarding their top priority. Governors ensure that staff and volunteers receive appropriate checks before working with the children. Leaders and staff receive regular training.

The key-worker system ensures that every child has a trusted adult to turn to for care. Some children are still learning to voice their concerns. Staff mitigate this by spotting any worrying changes to a child's appearance or behaviour. They report these concerns to leaders without delay.

Leaders determinedly secure support for vulnerable children and their families. Leaders maintain comprehensive records. Leaders are tenacious in ensuring that children get the right support, at the right time, including through their timely liaison with external agencies.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The curriculum is in the early stages of implementation. Some staff are unclear about the shared approaches leaders want them to use to maximise children's achievement. Leaders should provide training and support to enable staff to confidently deliver the curriculum aims.
- Some of the support for children with SEND lacks clarity. This is because assessment is not used well enough to accurately identify children's needs, and subsequent targets are not specific and measurable. As a result, some staff are unclear about how to help children with SEND achieve their best and this may slow the progress children make. Leaders should review their systems for assessment to inform the setting of targets so that staff may fine-tune the support they provide for children with SEND.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in March 2017.

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.

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	117069
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10212483
Type of school	Nursery
School category	Local authority nursery school
Age range of pupils	2 to 5
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	162
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Julie Cahill
Headteacher	Margaret Stocks
Website	www.birchwoodnursery.herts.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	9 and 10 March 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school offers pre-school provision for children from their second birthday.
- There is before- and after-school childcare for children attending the nursery school. It is run by school staff and managed by school leaders.
- School leaders do not currently use alternative provision for any children.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspector held meetings with leaders, including the headteacher, four senior leaders, three governors and a representative working on behalf of the local authority.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these areas of learning: communication and language, personal, social and emotional development, and literacy.

- For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with senior leaders, observed a large-group session, observed small-group focused activities, observed child-initiated play and spoke to children’s key workers.
- The inspector also reviewed minutes of governor meetings, leaders’ development plans, school policies and curriculum documentation for all the other areas of learning.
- To inspect safeguarding, the inspector spoke to the designated safeguarding lead and reviewed records. The inspector checked the single central record of recruitment and vetting checks. Also, the inspector spoke to governors, leaders and staff.
- To gather evidence around the experiences of children, the inspector observed children at different times during the school day, including at the before-school childcare provision.
- To gather the views of parents, the inspector spoke to several of them at the end of a school day. The inspector also took account of the 34 responses, including 27 free-text responses, to Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted’s online survey.
- To gather the views of staff, the inspector spoke to several of them. The inspector also took account of the 19 responses to Ofsted’s staff survey.

Inspection team

Daniel Short, lead inspector

His Majesty’s Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2022