

Inspection of a good school: Birchfield Nursery School

Victoria Avenue, Widnes, Cheshire WA8 7TH

Inspection date:

8 December 2022

Outcome

Birchfield Nursery School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Children are happy, and benefit from the gentle, thoughtful support that staff give them at Birchfield Nursery School. They trust the staff to look after them. Children share their ideas and opinions with staff. They know that teachers and teaching assistants are genuinely interested in what they wish to say.

Children profit from the worthwhile and interesting curriculum. They achieve well because leaders and staff have high expectations for their learning and behaviour. Children become confident, enthusiastic investigators who love learning new knowledge such as by singing, reciting stories and counting.

Children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are kind and self-controlled. They participate well in group activities because staff sensitively help them to know how to behave. Children have many friends at the nursery school. On the rare occasions that disagreements arise between children, staff help them to resolve problems quickly.

Children explore the five linked classrooms and the large outdoor area with confidence. Staff teach them to be responsible for the tidiness of different learning areas as a 'tidy up team'. They learn to watch the local heron when it flies in to visit the local pond and to watch out for trespassing ducks on the playground.

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

Mostly, leaders and staff have worked together effectively to establish a meaningful curriculum for children. Leaders have thought carefully about what children need to learn, for instance to become confident talkers, readers and mathematicians. Staff help children to think and to ask and answer questions.

Leaders have focused well on identifying and resolving any gaps in children's learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Children who are unaccustomed to learning at school

or mixing with other children are given the support that they need. Staff help them to settle quickly and smoothly into daily school life. Nevertheless, in a few areas of learning, leaders have not thought enough about the important knowledge that children should remember.

Staff provide children with a wide range of interesting and challenging learning activities. Children participate in beneficial group times, including when they are taught to sing and to say the sounds that letters represent. Children develop their love of stories and information books through frequent reading and rereading with staff. For example, children have become familiar with 'Barry the Fish with Fingers' or 'No-Bot' the story of Bernard the Robot who loses his bottom. Staff select books with care. Leaders ensure that staff are well trained to understand the teaching of communication and language, phonics and early reading. Children gain a secure foundation for continuing to learn to read at primary school.

Leaders ensure that the curriculum builds on what children have learned before. Staff identify when children struggle with new learning. When needed, they give children extra practice, revised explanations of key information or opportunities to learn in smaller steps. Nevertheless, staff do not make enough use of the school's curriculum as a means by which to assess children's learning. Instead, they over-use nationally published age bands of what a child may typically know. This means staff are less certain about children's understanding of the taught curriculum. That said, children mostly achieve well.

Staff effectively observe, support and extend children's learning of the curriculum. They act promptly if they identify that any child, including those with SEND, needs extra help from staff or other professionals. Children with SEND receive a beneficial education, which is as ambitious as that of their peers.

Learning activities at the nursery are busy with children at ease with themselves and others. Low-level disruption is not an issue due to the high-quality relationships between children and with staff.

Staff make full use of every opportunity to extend children's broader development. For instance, they help children to understand the importance of eating fruit as a snack. Leaders ensure that children develop respect for the differences between people, families and communities, including through music. For example, leaders play recordings of opera music to gently accompany children while they talk and play.

Leaders and staff effectively guide parents and carers through the big step of helping their child to start at school for the very first time. Staff communicate well with parents about children's learning.

Leaders act fairly to reduce staff's workload. For example, they have ensured that staff do not overburden themselves by completing written assessments of children too often. Leaders thoughtfully support the well-being of staff. Staff feel valued, in part because leaders make much use of their professional expertise to develop aspects of the school's curriculum. Members of the governing body put their knowledge and skills to good use to support and challenge leaders' work.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that staff are up to date on national and local safeguarding issues. Staff watch for any changes in children's behaviour, or comments that suggest they are worried about their experiences at home or school. Leaders and staff make appropriate records of relevant information. Leaders ensure that safeguarding concerns are shared with other agencies. Staff teach children the importance of trusting adults at school as well as other people such as police officers.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a few areas of learning, leaders do not make clear enough to staff the essential knowledge to teach children. This means that children learn less deeply than they might. Leaders should make clear to staff the key foundational knowledge that they want children to learn in all areas of the school's curriculum.
- When assessing the abilities of children, including those with SEND, staff over-use age bands rather than the school's curriculum. This approach risks missing how well children are learning leaders' intended curriculum. Leaders should ensure that staff focus their assessment techniques on children's learning of the curriculum.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. 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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in November 2013.

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	110958
Local authority	Halton
Inspection number	10240899
Type of school	Nursery
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3 to 5
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	81
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Ian Kirkham
Headteacher	Catherine Liku
Website	http://birchfield.haltonschoools.info
Date of previous inspection	18 July 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The headteacher is new to her post since the previous inspection. Some other staff are new to the school.
- Leaders do not use any alternative provision for children.
- Leaders provide a breakfast club and after-school club for children.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection that the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders, and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors completed deep dives in these areas of learning: early reading, mathematics and knowledge and understanding of the world. They met with subject leaders, visited learning activities, reviewed children's work and spoke with staff and children. This included observing children's learning outdoors.
- Inspectors spoke with some parents and reviewed responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments.

- Inspectors considered responses from staff to Ofsted’s online survey. Inspectors spoke with several staff about leaders’ support for their work.
- Inspectors met with leaders to discuss SEND, behaviour and provision for children’s personal development.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of governors, hosted at the premises of a neighbouring secondary school. Two other governors attended this meeting remotely.
- To evaluate safeguarding, inspectors spoke with children, parents, leaders and staff. Inspectors observed around the premises and checked examples of leaders’ records and policies.

Inspection team

Tim Vaughan, lead inspector

His Majesty’s Inspector

Maria McGarry

Ofsted 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