

# Inspection of Birches First School

Birches Avenue, Codsall, Wolverhampton, West Midlands WV8 2JG

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Inspection dates: 28 and 29 November 2023

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Good</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Early years provision	<b>Good</b>
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is Sabrina Varricchione. This school is part of Codsall Multi-Academy Trust (CMAT), which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Pete Bowers, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Tyrone Field.

Ofsted has not previously inspected Birches First School as an academy under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 as, until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between inspections. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last graded inspection of the predecessor school.

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

This school does many things well. Academic standards are high, good behaviour is the norm and lessons are full of interesting things to do. Beyond lessons, there are clubs, trips and extra activities that support learning and pupils' broader development. All of this means that pupils like school and find joy in learning. Indeed, pupils of all ages are quick to recall the school's motto of 'believe, grow succeed...to be the best me I can be'. They can explain what it means and how it captures the school's high expectations.

In class and on the playground, pupils are kind to one another. The school's rules are fair and support pupils to stay safe and respect others. Bullying is not accepted, and the school has systems for dealing with it should it happen. If any pupils are upset or worried, then staff always make time for them. There is also a suggestions box where pupils can submit their ideas to the pupil-led school council.

Informed, hard-working leadership and caring teamwork have created a positive school culture. Leaders and staff make sure pupils feel valued and support them to succeed in many different areas of school life.

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

This is a good school. Leaders know what is going well and where things could be even better. This evaluative approach means that ongoing school improvement is informed and effective.

Reading and mathematics are organised and taught well. All staff keep up with phonics training and follow the school's structured approach with consistency. Staff put on workshops for parents and carers and invite them to watch lessons. This helps everyone to know what is happening and strengthens the partnership between home and school. If pupils fall behind, then staff help them to catch up. This happens through extra support in lessons or additional teaching at other times.

As well as these formal structures, there is a healthy reading culture. Beginning in the Nursery class, staff take pupils to the local library for story times. Teachers read aloud every day. The school has run story clubs and there is a reading 'den' on the playground for pupils to use at breaktimes. All in all, a lot of reading happens in this school. By the time they move into key stage 2, most pupils are fluent readers. The quality of handwriting, however, is mixed.

The rest of the curriculum is suitably broad and ambitious. The early years classrooms provide children with a super start to school. There is lots of purposeful play, constructive talk and warm encouragement. This paves the way for learning in different subjects in key stage 1 and beyond.

Leaders and staff keep up with current educational thinking and access subject-specific training. The impact of this can be seen in the quality of the school's

curriculum design. In geography and history, for example, leaders have sequenced learning carefully. They also plan lessons that revisit certain content and concepts regularly. This helps pupils to remember key knowledge over the long term and apply what they know in new situations. When learning about the Great Fire of London, for example, pupils were able to draw on their knowledge of cities, weather and materials to consider cause and consequence.

In mathematics and reading, assessment is regular and efficient. In several other subjects, assessment practice is still developing.

The school team works closely with trust staff and other professionals to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Needs are identified accurately, and the school keeps parents informed about decisions and support. Staff make suitable adaptations in lessons and provide additional resources. Pupils with SEND access the same learning as their peers and achieve.

In addition to their studies, pupils are taught how to look after themselves and others. They learn about safe, respectful relationships and responsible behaviour. They know the difference between right and wrong. Furthermore, staff look out for positive, helpful behaviour and recognise it with rewards in school. Learning outdoors in the forest school area or through trips to places of interest add to the variety of school life.

Parents are supportive. During this inspection, many were keen to share positive words about the school. They describe it as a 'lovely, busy school'. Some felt unsettled by the number of staff changes. This inspection found that the quality of the curriculum guidance for staff has helped to minimise any disruption to learning. Pupils continue to achieve well across the curriculum.

Staff like working at the school. Teachers feel supported by leaders in their work, welfare and professional development.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- Routines for checking on what pupils know and remember work better in some subjects than others. This means assessment in some foundation subjects is not as informed as it could be. The school should continue to develop assessment in foundation subjects so that it is manageable, efficient, helps to embed pupils' learning and prepares them for what comes next.

- Pupils' presentation of written work is mixed. In part, this is the result of the disruption to education caused by the pandemic. However, there are other factors at play, including some variance in expectations for handwriting. This affects pupils' progress. The school should ensure that pupils are taught good writing habits from the start and get enough consistent practice.

## 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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	144935
<b>Local authority</b>	Staffordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10290641
<b>Type of school</b>	First
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3 to 9
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	149
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Tyrone Field
<b>Headteacher</b>	Sabrina Varricchione
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.birches.staffs.sch.uk">www.birches.staffs.sch.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- The school is part of CMAT.
- The school has a nursery class that takes children from three-years-old.
- The school provides before- and after-school childcare. It does not use any alternative provision.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors considered published performance data about the school. Inspectors also looked at a range of school documents. These included

information about pupils' behaviour, attendance, the curriculum, extra-curricular activities, governance, school improvement planning and documents published on the school's website.

- During the inspection, the inspectors had formal meetings with the headteacher, other leaders, staff, pupils, governors and the chief executive officer of CMAT.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: reading, mathematics, science and geography. In these subjects, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and considered pupils' work. They also considered the curriculum in other subjects to check how they were organised and taught.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors talked informally with pupils, parents and staff to gather general information about school life. They took account of the responses to Ofsted's surveys of staff and parents' views.
- Inspectors observed pupils in class, at lunchtime, on the playground, at clubs and at other times during the day.

### **Inspection team**

Martin Pye, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Rob Johnstone

Ofsted Inspector

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