

Inspection of Birchwood Nursery School

Birchway, Crawford Road, Hatfield, Hertfordshire AL10 0PD

Inspection dates: 27 and 28 February 2024

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Previous inspection grade

Outstanding

What is it like to attend this school?

Children arrive with a smile, looking forward to the day ahead. They are confident of the welcome that awaits them here. Children are happy and settle quickly. Staff have exceptional relationships with children and adjust activities to ensure that the day gets off to a smooth start.

Expectations for behaviour are high, starting in pre-school. Even the youngest children rise to these expectations and flourish. Familiar routines, clear language and plenty of praise and encouragement help everyone learn how to behave very well. Children quickly copy the good manners and friendly behaviour that adults model for them. Children show high levels of respect and care for each other and for their resources. They help each other and show kindness towards their peers.

Children are deeply engrossed in their learning throughout the day. Adults help those who wish to join in with imaginative games to do so. Many children revel in the outdoor space and opportunities to run and explore. Children eagerly dress themselves, ready to investigate nature. They learn to appreciate seasonal changes and enjoy the changes in our weather. Children are fascinated by the patterns, sights and sounds in the natural area.

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

Governors and school leaders are united in their pursuit of constant improvement. Working effectively with the wider school community, they have developed a clear vision and underpinning values. These inform all that they do as they move forwards together.

The school has reflected carefully on how best to meet the needs of its children. It has developed an aspirational curriculum. The curriculum clearly sets out the steps of development across each area of learning. This enables staff to check what children know and carefully tailor their provision to address any gaps and move learning on. Staff provide many opportunities throughout the day to introduce and practise new concepts and ambitious vocabulary. For example, children encounter the word 'serrated' when studying the leaves of plants outdoors. They practise it again when using age-appropriate knives as part of their regular cookery sessions.

Stories, songs and rhymes are at the heart of the curriculum. The school has thoughtfully selected high-quality texts to develop children's language skills and a love of books. Children eagerly join in with adults to retell familiar stories, practising new words together. These book choices inspire their play. For example, children make houses for 'The Gruffalo', carefully selecting materials and praising each other's efforts.

Staff are vigilant to identify any children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff work with families and, when appropriate, external agencies to put the right support in place for children. For some children with

complex needs, bespoke sessions closely tailored to their needs help them to feel secure while they practise their skills. For the rest of the day, children with SEND are well integrated with their peers. Adults skilfully support their play when needed.

The school regularly reviews the progress of all children. It checks that disadvantaged pupils are achieving as well as their peers. Children develop highly positive attitudes to learning. They are well prepared to succeed academically and socially in their next settings.

Throughout the day, children in pre-school and nursery develop independence. Adults know when to provide guidance and help children make their own choices. Children quickly learn self-help skills, such as dressing themselves. They engage in challenging tasks safely with adults always on hand to praise, prompt or help when needed.

Children show high levels of respect for each other as well as the staff who work with them. Children patiently wait for their turns, share equipment considerately and responsibly put resources away. They show great pride in their achievements. The school ensures that the rich diversity of the children and their families is reflected in the books and resources that children engage with.

Leaders know that the school's provision enables children to thrive. They are vigorous in promoting regular, punctual attendance. As a result, children are well prepared and ready for the next step in their education.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

Unique reference number	117069
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10294954
Type of school	Nursery
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	2 to 5
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	170
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Julie Cahill
Headteacher	Margaret Stocks
Website	www.birchwoodnursery.herts.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	29 and 30 November 2022, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school does not use any off-site providers of alternative education.
- 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.

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.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with senior staff in the school, including the headteacher, chair of governors, and the designated lead for safeguarding. Inspectors also spoke with representatives of the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in communication and language; personal, social and emotional development; mathematics; and expressive arts and design. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with senior leaders, observed focused group activities and child-initiated play and spoke with other staff.
- Inspectors reviewed minutes of governors' meetings, school development plans, curriculum documentation and external reports relating to the school.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and children; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspection team considered the views of parents through responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and spoke with several parents. Inspectors gathered the views of staff through Ofsted's staff survey, as well as discussions conducted throughout the inspection.

Inspection team

Lynne Williams, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Fiona Webb

Ofsted Inspector

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