



Birch Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 115138
LEA ESSEX LEA
Inspection number 279520
Inspection dates 16 May 2006 to 16 May 2006
Reporting inspector Mr. Raymond Jardine LI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to inspect any school in England. The inspection is to be treated as a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary	School address	School Hill
School category	Voluntary aided		CO2 0LZ
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01206330224
Number on roll	114	Fax number	01206330175
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Rev.Keith Lovell
Date of previous inspection	17 January 2000	Headteacher	Miss. Catherine Moore

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. During the day visit, the inspector met with a range of staff and pupils and observed the school at work including lessons in every class. Paired observations were also carried out with the headteacher. The school's preparatory papers and its very good self-evaluation documents provided further evidence that helped to shape the inspector's judgements. A discussion with governors and receipt of 55 parents' questionnaires also informed the writing of this report.

Description of the school

Birch Church of England Voluntary Aided (VA) Primary School serves the village of Birch and the surrounding rural community. Almost all of its pupils are of White British heritage. The socio-economic backgrounds of pupils' families are very diverse but few pupils are entitled to free school meals. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs is about average. An above average proportion joins the school other than at the usual times. Pupils' attainment on entry is broadly average but there is a significant proportion whose language and social skills are below average. The school has achieved the following awards: Healthy Schools, Active Mark Gold, Essex Schools and Investors in People.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

It is no surprise that Birch Church of England VA Primary School is very popular and over-subscribed. It is a good school that has some outstanding features. Its key strengths are in the rigorous systems used to monitor and review its performance, the staff's close teamwork and their relentless drive to improve the quality of education and pupils' standards. Consequently, the school provides a happy, calm and purposeful atmosphere within which pupils thrive. Standards have improved considerably over the past four years and are above average overall. They were exceptionally high in both English and mathematics in 2005 and pupils made outstanding progress in both subjects. However, science standards dipped and were about average. The school's response to this dip is indicative of its outstanding leadership and management. A thorough analysis of the results and the quality of pupils' work revealed weaknesses in the way they acquire and apply their scientific enquiry skills from year to year. Prompt and determined actions by the subject leader are already making an impact, although this remains work in progress for the older, more able pupils. The Foundation Stage curriculum is planned very well. The vibrant and rich environment and effective teaching in their classroom helps children to make good progress, especially in their social and emotional development and their language skills. However, the school is working with governors to provide better resources for their outdoor play area. Pupils' personal development is an outstanding feature of the school. They develop very positive attitudes and feel happy and safe. Their behaviour is excellent. Pupils develop a real love of learning and are encouraged to work independently and to contribute actively in lessons. Indeed, the school encourages them to take responsibility and initiative in many ways. Learning leaders in Year 6 eagerly help younger pupils in their literacy and numeracy skills after lunch-times and check how many times they put up their hand to answer questions in lessons. In the lunch club, pupils welcome guests to chat over a meal which they themselves have cooked. Such approaches contribute much to developing pupils' social skills, confidence and self-esteem. Pupils understand the importance of a good diet and fitness to their health and well-being. The school has achieved national awards for its provision in this area. The school's religious character also pervades its work so that pupils reflect on their lives and those of others. Pupils learn about their own culture and, to some extent, those of others. However, more needs to be done, as the school acknowledges, to help pupils learn of the many cultural traditions and beliefs that make up modern British society. Pupils enjoy the interesting and demanding lessons because teachers and learning support assistants are skilled at involving pupils in learning for themselves. One pupil summed up the views of many very well: 'Teachers make the work fun and we are learning a lot at the same time.' Activities often capture pupils' imagination. Consequently they are attentive and eager to learn, as Year 3 and 4 pupils demonstrated in their history lesson. Placing themselves in the role of children at school during World War Two, pupils heard the siren warning and immediately evacuated their classroom to continue their lesson in the darkness of a real air-raid shelter located in the school grounds. Lessons are planned carefully so that pupils of all abilities are challenged at an appropriate level in their mixed-age classes. All pupils are given targets for their next steps in learning in English

and mathematics, and, in some years, they are learning to review their own progress in meeting them. This is a developing area for the school where the best practice is being shared to extend its influence. The curriculum is well-planned and innovative. The school seeks to use the attractive grounds to full advantage to enrich pupils' experiences across the curriculum. Pupils recall with joy their experiences of visits to museums, the theatre and residential weekends where they take part in outdoor adventures. They are very well cared for and closely monitored during their time at school. One parent said: 'From the moment she entered school, my child's teacher has worked wonders with her. Her self-confidence has improved miraculously and she has achieved so much this year. I can't thank the school enough.' One of the reasons for this success is the way assessment is used so well to track pupils' progress in English and mathematics, and more recently in science. Consequently, those at risk of not achieving well are identified early. Prompt action is taken and parents kept informed. Since her appointment four years ago, the headteacher has provided outstanding leadership and a very strong direction for the school's work focussed on raising standards. To achieve the school's aim of 'Success for All' she has developed the leadership and management skills of all the staff and challenged them to be innovative and creative in improving the quality of education. Staff are confident, highly committed and work closely so that standards of care and pupils' personal development in particular, are outstanding. Self-evaluation is accurate and systematic. It is also broadly based on the detailed analyses of patterns and trends in pupils' performance, and the views of staff, parents and pupils. Curriculum leaders play a full part in diagnosing strengths and weaknesses and in leading the drive to improve standards. Governors are supportive and well informed in a variety of ways. But they need to have a more central role in the school's cycle of monitoring and review by focussing more closely on progress in the priorities set out in the school's very good improvement plan.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils enter the school with broadly average attainment, although language and social skills are below those expected for children of this age. The school's focus on raising these aspects of children's learning at an early stage gives them a tremendous start. By Year 6, standards are significantly above average. Pupils are set demanding targets and their progress is closely watched throughout to ensure that they all succeed. Pupils respond eagerly and make good progress because they enjoy the stimulating and exciting lessons. Lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs do particularly well. In English and mathematics, pupils' progress is outstanding but in science it is not as strong.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Relationships are excellent. Pupils say that there is no bullying, 'and if there were, our teachers would stop it straight away.' Pupils' views are listened to and acted on through

the very active school council. Their proposals to create a school vegetable garden so that the produce can be used in the lunch club are being carried out next term. Pupils' basic skills, especially in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT), are very well developed and teamwork is strongly encouraged in lessons through stimulating projects. Consequently, pupils acquire very good skills that prepare them well for their future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good and outstanding in some areas such as the teaching of literacy and numeracy. Teachers and learning support assistants are skilled and well-trained. They use ICT very well to enhance the quality of class discussion and to model new ideas. Pupils with special educational needs receive very good support so that they are fully involved in learning. Training for all staff is helping to make their teaching of scientific enquiry skills more systematic, although more needs to be done to encourage older and more able pupils to apply higher skills such as considering the quality of evidence.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is imaginatively planned and innovative so that pupils enjoy a wide variety of experiences that bring their learning to life. The school makes full use of the local and wider community through visits such as to the House of Commons to debate education issues. Pupils participate in sporting initiatives and cultural festivals and enjoy a good variety of clubs and activities that also enrich their personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Arrangements for ensuring pupils' safety and welfare, including child protection arrangements and risk assessments, are robust. Staff know the pupils very well in this small school. Arrangements for pupils' induction into school are very good. Parents say that the school looks after their children very well and they strongly endorse its work. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is very well managed. Very good links with outside agencies ensure that those pupils with special educational needs are assessed and their progress reviewed very regularly with their teachers and parents.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher has successfully enabled staff throughout the school to take on shared leadership in developing aspects of the school's work and this close teamwork is a key reason for the school's rising standards in recent years. Innovation and initiative are strongly encouraged. The staff's research project into the use of video and ICT to encourage more creative writing has successfully raised pupils' writing standards. The recently completed outdoor drama and performance area is another exciting way of improving pupils' self-confidence and their speaking and listening skills. The school's much higher standards and better quality of education than at the time of the last inspection demonstrate its very good capacity to improve further. It provides good value for money.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

You will recall that I visited your school recently. I want to thank you all for the warm and polite welcome that I received. I especially enjoyed eating the very tasty lunch you kindly cooked for me! I spoke with many of you, including members of your school council. What you said helped me come to some judgements about the quality of education you receive. I think that you go to a good school. It has some excellent features. I was very impressed by the courtesy and respect that you show to each other and all adults. Your behaviour is also excellent and you are very keen to learn as much as you can. Some of you told me how much you enjoy lessons because the teaching is so good and learning is fun. Certainly you are doing very well in your English and mathematics, but your teachers are currently working to make the standards of your science just as high. You find the next step targets that you are regularly given very helpful. Some of you are learning how to check how well you are progressing towards them for yourselves but the school is working to help you all to do this. The very good skills that you are acquiring in using computers and the skills to work in teams, are preparing you very well for the future. There are also many opportunities provided for you to take responsibility and to help others which many of you enjoy. I was very impressed with the learning leaders who are helping younger pupils to do better. I have agreed with Miss Moore that you need to learn more about people from other cultural traditions. Miss Moore, her staff and the governors take very good care of you and work very hard to check the quality of the school's work and the progress that you make. They have been very successful in improving the quality of your education and have some exciting and imaginative ideas such as the new outdoor performance area. You too can play your part by making your attendance even better and trying, with your teachers' help, to improve your skills in science experiments. With all good wishes for your future at Birch Church of England VA Primary