

# Birchanger Church of England Controlled Primary School

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	115127
<b>Local Authority</b>	ESSEX LA
<b>Inspection number</b>	311845
<b>Inspection dates</b>	10–11 March 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Paul Missin

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary controlled
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	86
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Susan Haggerwood-Bullen
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Denise Howell
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	10 February 2003
<b>School address</b>	Birchwood Birchanger Bishop's Stortford Hertfordshire CM23 5QF
<b>Telephone number</b>	01279812362
<b>Fax number</b>	01279817061

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

## Description of the school

The school is much smaller than most other primary schools. Children's attainment on entry to school is broadly similar to that expected for children of this age, but they often have strengths in language and social skills. Almost all pupils are of White British background and none are at an early stage of learning English. A well below average proportion is eligible for free school meals and the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. Other than the Reception class, all classes contain pupils of more than one age group. The school has received Healthy School and Activemark awards.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

This is a good school where the needs of individual pupils are at the heart of its work. One parent wrote, 'This school provides a very nurturing environment where children are encouraged to develop as a whole person and reach high standards.' This comment correctly recognises the achievement of the school in successfully promoting its ethos, which encourages both the provision of a caring environment and a drive for high standards. The school ensures that all pupils are fully included in all that the school has to offer. This strength is promoted highly effectively by the headteacher who leads well by the example she sets and by the commitment and consistent approach of all adults in the school community. As a result, pupils' personal development and well-being are excellent.

Pupils are well behaved, confident and articulate. They feel safe and secure and show impressive levels of commitment and enthusiasm for all aspects of their learning. They enjoy school enormously and attend regularly. Pupils have an outstanding appreciation of healthy lifestyles and make an excellent contribution to the life of the school and the wider community. They are prepared exceptionally well for the next stage of their education and beyond. Those who are vulnerable or who find learning more difficult have good levels of support from teachers and outside agencies when required so that they achieve well.

Children get off to a good start in the Foundation Stage and make good progress in their learning. Pupils in Years 1 to Year 6 also make good progress. In the 2007 teacher assessments at the end of Year 2, standards were above average in all subjects. In the national tests at the end of Year 6, standards overall were well above average and high in English.

Teaching is good. Teachers promote literacy skills very well and the new 'letters and sounds' programme is helping to raise standards even further. An important strength is the way in which pupils are encouraged to discuss and share their ideas. This impacts very well on the very good speaking and listening skills across the school. Teachers manage pupils very well and ensure that they all take a full part in each lesson. Teachers do not consistently provide activities that fully challenge all pupils to do as well as they can in the mixed age classes.

The curriculum is good, especially in the way in which opportunities from visits, visitors and school clubs add enjoyment and bring learning to life. Leadership and management are also good. The priorities in the school improvement plan are relevant and recent initiatives to improve the monitoring of teaching and learning and to introduce more effective assessment systems have been successful. However, procedures for checking on the effectiveness of the school's work are not sufficiently rigorous. Information about how well pupils are doing is not being used well enough to set clear targets to help them to improve their work or to accurately measure the success of wider school improvement measures. Governors have a clear understanding of the school's work and support and challenge well. The school has good capacity to secure further improvements.

## Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

### Grade: 2

Children in the Reception class get a good start to their time at school. They make good progress in their learning to reach standards that are above those expected nationally by the beginning of Year 1. Children settle quickly and are soon ready to learn. There is a good focus on the development of personal and language skills. Teaching and the curriculum are good. The recent

focus on teaching letters and sounds is particularly strong and is helping to raise standards. The better use of the covered outside activity area and redevelopment of the role-play area are recognised by school leaders as areas for improvement in order to further extend children's learning.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Ensure that information about pupils' progress is used to bring more rigour to school improvement planning and to set clearer learning targets for pupils.
- Ensure that the most effective elements of teaching evident in some classes are applied consistently across the school.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Children make good progress in the Reception class and often reach standards above those expected for their age, particularly in their language and physical skills, by the beginning of Year 1. Pupils make progress in Years 1 and 2 where standards are above average, with strengths in reading and writing. Pupils continue to make good progress in Years 3 to 6. In 2007, standards in Year 6 were well above average, and particularly high in English. Standards in the current Year 6 are slightly lower than those in 2007, but pupils are continuing to make good progress from their different starting points. Pupils make particularly good progress in developing their confidence and ability to talk and communicate in a variety of contexts. Pupils who find learning difficult are supported well and also make good progress in their learning.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

Pupils' behaviour in class and their attitudes to adults and to each other are very good. Pupils' commitment to all their lessons, the enjoyment which they share and the drive to do their best is very impressive indeed. Relationships are exceptionally good and pupils settle to their work quickly and work well in groups when required. These strengths, and the standards pupils reach in their basic skills in Year 6, prepare them exceptionally well for the next stage in their education and beyond. Pupils enjoy coming to school and attendance is well above average. They have an excellent understanding of how to keep healthy and a good understanding of how to stay safe. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They have a very mature understanding of being part of a school community and have an important role in it, through their work as play leaders and school councillors. Pupils report that incidents of bullying are few and that they are quickly addressed.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Teachers manage pupils well, secure their good behaviour and establish positive relationships in their classes. Pupils are treated with respect and all their contributions are valued. As a result, pupils are fully committed to their work, are enthusiastic learners and are keen to work hard and do well. Where teaching is most effective, teachers make learning fun and ensure that all pupils are fully engaged in the lessons. An important strength is the way in which teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to talk about their work with partners and to explain

their thinking to others in the class. However, inconsistencies in teaching, limit its overall effectiveness. For example, teachers occasionally spend too long on activities that do not challenge pupils sufficiently, and planning for the needs of the mixed age and ability range of pupils is not sufficiently clear.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

The curriculum is appropriately focused on the development of basic literacy and numeracy skills. Good attention is given to enriching other aspects of the curriculum, such as the opportunity for pupils to learn French and to take part in specialist music tuition. The school is just beginning to develop clearer links between the different subjects in order to give pupils more opportunities to practise their basic skills in different ways. Learning is made interesting and relevant by a number of well-planned visits and visitors. These include visits to Duxford Imperial War Museum and a residential visit to the Isle of Wight for older pupils. Links with an inner city school in London provide valuable experiences of a multicultural city environment. An outstanding range of additional clubs further enhances the curriculum. Many pupils and parents are rightly very pleased with these opportunities.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

The school is very committed to ensuring that the needs of all pupils are met. All staff know pupils and their families well and they demonstrate an impressive consistency of approach. The needs of vulnerable pupils are quickly assessed and a range of support and intervention procedures has been introduced, with the help of outside agencies when appropriate. Parents are appreciative of this caring approach. Child protection procedures are clear and meet requirements. Appropriate risk assessments are undertaken. The school is beginning to collect a good range of assessment information to track the progress that pupils are making in reading, writing and mathematics. However, this is just being established and is not yet used rigorously or consistently across the school. The use of this information to set helpful pupils' learning targets is also at an early stage of development.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The headteacher leads and manages the school well and ensures that the needs of individual pupils are at the centre of its work. This strength is appreciated by many parents. The headteacher is well supported by other teaching staff, several of whom share leadership roles in this small school. They work well together to encourage and support each other. Recent monitoring of teaching and learning, and the use of assessment data to track the progress that pupils make, is beginning to give the school a good view of its effectiveness. However, the evaluation of initiatives has been too informal and has been made more difficult by a lack of clear targets against which to measure their success in overall planning. The governing body carries out its responsibilities well. Governors have a clear view of the school's work and are beginning to challenge the school well.

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## Annex A

## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

### Achievement and standards

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

### Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

### The quality of provision

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

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



## Annex A

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

27 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Birchanger CE Primary School, Bishop's Stortford, CM23 5QF

Thank you for making me so welcome when I came to the school recently to see how well you were doing.

Here are the things that I think are best about your school:

- The obvious enjoyment and enthusiasm which you show in lessons is very impressive indeed.
- You contribute exceptionally well to the school community and take part in many village events.
- You come to school regularly and get on very well with each other.
- Children in the Reception class settle quickly and get off to a good start to their time at school.
- Your reach standards and make progress which are better than most.
- You do particularly well in your reading and writing and you all discuss and express your ideas keenly, sensibly and very confidently.
- Your headteacher and all the other staff ensure that you are well looked after and that the school is attractive and safe.

There are just two things that I thought could be better:

- School leaders and teachers need to make even better use of information about how well you are doing to set you more helpful learning targets and to make sure that the school is continuing to improve as quickly as it can.
- Teachers need to ensure that they always provide work which will interest and challenge all the pupils in each class to make sure that you all do as well as you can.

I wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Paul Missin

Lead inspector