

# Birch Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	115138
<b>Local Authority</b>	Essex
<b>Inspection number</b>	326131
<b>Inspection dates</b>	3–4 December 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Florence Olajide

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	114
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Sue Gee
<b>Headteacher</b>	Miss Catherine Moore
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	16 May 2006
<b>Date of previous funded early education inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Date of previous childcare inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>School address</b>	School Hill Birch CO2 0LZ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01206 330224
<b>Fax number</b>	01206 330175

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<b>Age group</b>	5–11
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

## Description of the school

This smaller than average school serves the rural village of Birch and the surrounding community. The vast majority of pupils are from a White British background. All the pupils speak English as their first language. The proportion entitled to free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average and very few of these have a statement of educational need. The school has an unusually large number of pupils in local authority care.

The school makes provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) from the age of four. Pupils enter the school with standards that are generally typical for their age, although variations between cohorts are sometimes significant. A Sure Start Children's Centre, which is managed by an independent organisation, was opened on the school site in March 2008. 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

This is a good school. It has some outstanding features. Leaders, staff and governors are committed to providing pupils with an educational experience that prepares them well for adulthood. As a result, they work in partnership with other community organisations to ensure that all pupils have access to an exciting curriculum and good teaching, care, guidance and support. This is summed up by a parent who described the school as 'an asset to the community'. The school's Christian values underpin the positive relationships and learning atmosphere and do much to promote pupils' personal development and well-being, which are outstanding. Pupils are confident and mature; even the youngest work cooperatively. Their behaviour is impeccable in lessons and they conduct themselves with decorum. Parents correctly note that older pupils act as positive role models for younger ones and are good ambassadors for the school.

Pupils' overall achievement is good. Standards attained in the national tests in Years 2 and 6 have been average in recent years, having declined from above average. In response, leaders reviewed the curriculum and the strategies for teaching writing and for assessing science. The recently introduced skills-based curriculum has helped to make learning more meaningful. It has enabled pupils to develop a good range of skills, particularly their writing, across different subjects. The school's data and inspection evidence indicate that pupils are now making good progress in reading, writing and science and standards are above those expected in these subjects. Although progress in mathematics is slower, it is excellent in information and communication technology (ICT) where pupils achieve standards above those expected for their age.

Teaching is good, with particular strengths in the use of ICT to engage pupils' interest. Teaching strategies integrate a range of styles, techniques and resources and pupils are encouraged to learn using all their senses. This motivates them; they have excellent attitudes to their work and derive much enjoyment from practical activities. Parents' views that their children are well cared for are accurate. Pupils feel secure and happy in school and they receive good academic guidance.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides a strong direction to the school and the good teamwork among leaders is helping to maximise the use of resources. School improvement priorities focus on raising standards and leaders track the progress of individual pupils carefully. However, the use of data to track the performance of groups is not sharp enough. In addition, the outcomes by which the school will measure the success of its initiatives are not always defined in measurable terms. As a result, self-evaluation tends to focus on implementation rather than outcomes and this has led to a somewhat overgenerous assessment by the school of its own effectiveness. Governance has improved significantly since the last inspection with the establishment of more rigorous systems for finding out how the school works. The improvements in governance, the use of ICT, and rising standards in science demonstrate the school's good capacity to improve further.

## Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

### Grade: 2

Children in the Reception class learn in a very attractive indoor and outdoor learning space. Although their attainment on entry is broadly average, some of their skills, especially in language

and communication, are lower than might be expected. Despite this, they make good progress from their starting points and, by the end of the Reception year, the vast majority reach the goals expected of them in most aspects of their learning. Arrangements to help children to become familiar with Reception are very good. The care and support that adults provide help children to settle quickly into routines and to develop in confidence. Children respond very well to adults and show good interest in activities. They work very well with each other and amicably share tasks in activities like cooking. The provision is led and managed well. The curriculum is planned meticulously, with a good balance between tasks that are led by adults and those that children initiate for themselves. Newly introduced assessment systems are not yet fully embedded. Nonetheless, they are ensuring that more careful attention is paid to monitoring individual progress. Children all have targets that are shared with parents. Good attention is paid to safeguarding their welfare and appropriate arrangements have been made to ensure that first aid training is in line with the latest government requirements.

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

- Accelerate pupils' progress and raise standards in mathematics.
- Sharpen the use of assessment data to track the progress of groups of pupils and use this to fine-tune the focus of school improvement.
- Define outcomes that can be clearly measured, by which the school will evaluate its success.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Results of national assessments in Years 2 and 6 in 2007 and 2008 were average, representing satisfactory achievement for the pupils involved. However, the year groups taking the tests are very small and this can have a significant impact on standards from year to year. Nonetheless, recognising that these results were lower than the usual above average standards, leaders took decisive action to improve achievement by reviewing the curriculum and teaching methods. This has led to improvements, particularly in the quality of pupils' writing, and pupils are now achieving well in English and science. Standards in mathematics have yet to show a similar improvement. This is partly because some of the more able pupils are not being provided with sufficient challenge. In ICT, pupils demonstrate a range of higher order skills. Pupils in all year groups use the technology confidently to produce presentations using pictures, text and animated objects that reflect their learning in many different subjects. The small number of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those in local authority care also make good progress.

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

### **Grade: 1**

Pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development are outstanding. Impressively, pupils' cultural awareness has improved considerably since the last inspection. For example, older pupils have a good understanding of why America's election of its first African-American president was a landmark event. Pupils have an excellent knowledge of how to stay safe and healthy. They make a good contribution to the school and wider community by taking on roles and responsibilities such as prefects, play leaders and being members of the school council. Attendance remains no better than satisfactory because many pupils take holidays during term time. Pupils develop good financial awareness through a range of activities that include running

mock companies. This, together with their very good ICT, good literacy and satisfactory numeracy skills provide pupils with a sound foundation for their future economic well-being.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Teachers use a range of practical and imaginative activities and ICT very effectively to develop pupils' knowledge and skills. Strategies such as the use of film and drama are successfully engaging and enthusing boys particularly, in order to improve their writing. Lessons are well planned and structured. Expectations are high and pupils know what they are aiming for. Recent improvements ensure that pupils are constantly reminded of their targets and are often involved in assessing their own progress. Teaching assistants and other volunteers provide pupils who need extra help with good support by explaining concepts, asking questions and encouraging them to participate fully in lessons. However, their time is not always used efficiently when teachers are engaged in teaching the whole class. Where teaching assistants instruct the whole class, the quality of such teaching is good. To improve standards in mathematics the more able pupils across the school are now grouped for a teaching session once a week. This is providing them with better challenge in their work.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

The well-planned curriculum has particular strengths in the way links are made across subjects, thus making very effective use of learning time. There is good provision for music and modern foreign languages. Themed days, such as the 'European day of languages', promote pupils' awareness of other cultures and languages. Pupils enjoy a number of clubs and other activities, which include sports, music and ICT. Visits and visitors further enhance the curriculum and contribute to pupils' understanding of safety, healthy eating and cultural diversity. Recent improvements to the way that writing and science are being taught and assessed are accelerating pupils' progress in these subjects.

### **Care, guidance and support**

#### **Grade: 2**

The school works effectively with external agencies and parent volunteers to support pupils' welfare. Pupils in local authority care receive very good support for their social and emotional needs. For example, the school has helped to arrange home transport to ensure they can participate in after-school activities. Safeguarding arrangements meet all requirements and suitable plans are in place to train new staff. Risk assessments are appropriate and the school has been prompt to respond to parents' concerns in relation to recent building works. There are suitable arrangements to ensure Internet safety. Assessment is used effectively to monitor pupils' progress and set challenging targets for individuals. Pupils receive useful advice on how to improve their work. A minority of parents have strong views about weak communication between home and school, which the school has begun to address. Governors recently took appropriate but stronger steps to reduce the number of holidays taken in term-time, although this is not yet having a significant impact.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The school's excellent links and partnerships with other agencies are used effectively to improve provision for pupils and the wider community. Outcomes of such partnerships include the establishment of the children's centre on the school site. This is promoting community cohesion well and is providing prospective pupils and their parents with access to a range of pre-school, health and community services. Effective staff professional development is helping to maintain good standards of teaching, despite several recent changes in staff. Governors are very supportive of the school. They have a useful action plan to aid their work and many visit regularly to review aspects of the school's work.

**Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).**



**Annex A**

**Inspection judgements**

<b>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</b>	<b>School Overall</b>
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**Overall effectiveness**

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

**Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

<b>How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?</b>	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

**Achievement and standards**

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	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/or disabilities make progress	2

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<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.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

## The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	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

## 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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

**Annex B****Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

5 December 2008

Dear Pupils,

Inspection of Birch Church of England (VA) Primary School, Birch, CO2 0LZ

Thank you for taking the time to talk to me when I visited your school recently. As I promised, this letter is to tell you what I found out. Your school is good and there are many positive things about it. Here are just a few.

- You and all the adults really respect each other and you all work very hard to make your school a nice place to be.
- You are confident, extremely well behaved and have excellent attitudes to learning.
- The good teaching is helping you to achieve better, especially in writing, and most of you are very good at using computers to learn and improve your work.
- You all enjoy school, especially the fun and practical activities in lessons.
- Your school is excellent at working with other people to ensure that you get a good education and the best support.

To make your school even better I have asked the adults to:

- help you to learn faster and better in mathematics
- check that all the different groups of pupils are making good progress and use this information to decide what they need to improve
- make sure that they can measure easily whether the school is really improving.

I noticed that your attendance is not as good as it should be. I hope that you and your parents will support the school in making sure that this improves. I also hope you continue to do well in your work and wish you all the best for the future.

Florence Olajide

Lead inspector