

Birchington Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118693
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	326871
Inspection dates	10–11 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Paul Missin

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.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	412
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
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mark Prescott
Headteacher	Kathleen Barham
Date of previous school inspection	23 February 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Park Lane Birchington CT7 0AS
Telephone number	01843 841046
Fax number	01843 846034

Age group	5–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This school is much larger than most other primary schools and the number on roll is increasing. Children generally start the Reception class with knowledge and skills that are well below those expected for their age and several do not have any previous pre-school experience. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above average and the proportion with statements of special educational needs is broadly average. Most pupils are of White British backgrounds. A slightly below average proportion is eligible for free school meals. The school has awards for Healthy Schools, ActiveMark, ArtsMark, Investors in People, a Primary Modern Foreign Language Silver Award and for being a Silver Eco-School.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory standard of education for its pupils. It has been through some significant leadership changes in the past few years which together limited its capacity to improve quickly enough. However, since the appointment of the current headteacher, the pace of change has accelerated significantly. The headteacher gives the school clear, firm and inspirational leadership. Many of the leadership and management systems have been revised, bringing new rigour to self-evaluation processes. Although many procedures for securing school improvement are now in place, leadership and management are only satisfactory overall because they have not yet impacted consistently enough on raising standards and accelerating the progress that all pupils make. The priority to do this is implicit but not sufficiently explicit in the school improvement plan and there is scope for the success criteria of initiatives to be more closely linked to outcomes in learning. The headteacher is well supported by other senior staff and an active governing body.

Standards across the school are beginning to rise and most pupils are making at least satisfactory progress in their learning, and some are making good progress. Currently, standards in reading, writing and mathematics in Year 2 and those in English, mathematics and science in Year 6 are broadly average. Standards at all levels are improving. Achievement overall is satisfactory, but progress in different years is inconsistent, mainly because of variations in the quality of teaching and learning. Teaching is satisfactory overall, but with several good and excellent features. Teachers manage pupils well and create very responsive working relationships in their classes. Pupils discuss confidently and co-operate willingly and effectively when requested to do so. In several important areas, such as the effectiveness of marking of pupils' work and the match of work to pupils' ability, practice is inconsistent across the school. The curriculum is satisfactory. The school has planned a good number of enhancements such as visits and visitors and provides a particularly effective focus on music. Plans for the introduction of a full 'creative curriculum' are still being developed.

Pupils' personal development is good. Pupils behave well and most are polite and responsible to adults. They settle quickly to their work, show interest and commitment and are keen to do their best. Pupils have a good appreciation of the responsibilities of being part of a school and wider community. Their understanding of the part they play in encouraging harmony in the local and wider community is good. Pupils have a good appreciation of healthy lifestyles and know how to keep safe. Most enjoy their learning, and attendance rates, which have improved steadily in recent years, are now average. The strengths identified at the last inspection in the care for individual pupils has been maintained and strengthened. Overall, pupils' care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Pupils are well looked after and adults know individual children's personal needs well. The provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who may be vulnerable or distressed is good. There is good access to a wide range of different support groups in school and to outside specialists when required. A good range of assessment data is collected and this is beginning to be used more robustly to set challenging targets and to support and guide pupils to make better progress, but this remains inconsistent. Given the rapid pace of change and significant improvements already made, the school is well placed to secure further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children start school with knowledge and skills that are generally well below those expected for their age, with especially low language and personal skills. They achieve well and make good progress to reach standards by the beginning of Year 1 that are broadly average, but often lower in language and communication skills. Children make good progress because of the effective, confident teaching and a curriculum which is well planned to meet their varying needs, including for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Teachers settle children quickly to school routines, and the positive relationships and the attractive secure learning environment encourage children's personal development well. As a result, they quickly grow in confidence and behave well. A good range of appropriate activities is provided and there is an effective balance between those led by adults and those that children choose for themselves. Assessments, through daily observations, are used well to ensure that activities successfully build on the children's previous learning. Teaching assistants are skilful and experienced and they provide good quality support. Improvements to the outdoor environment have extended children's learning experiences. Leadership is good and the leader is aware of the priority to develop children's spoken language skills further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Use assessment, including marking, more consistently to set challenging targets and guide pupils on how to improve their work.
- Set work which is more closely geared to the needs of individual pupils.
- Sharpen the focus on raising standards and improving progress through linking improvement planning to outcomes in learning.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Assessments in Year 2 and national tests in Year 6 in recent years have been mostly below, and sometimes well below, average. However, standards across the school are now beginning to rise and the progress that pupils make is accelerating. Pupils in Year 2 are currently on track to reach average standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils in Year 6 are also reaching standards in English, mathematics and science which are broadly average, with an increasing number reaching the higher Level 5. This represents good improvement from results in national tests in 2008 and reflects the good progress which these pupils are making since the beginning of the year. However, the pattern across other year groups is too variable and not all year groups are catching up quickly enough. Pupils who need extra help with their learning make good progress because of the good support they receive. Achievement is satisfactory overall. Challenging targets are raising expectations of both staff and pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The pupils understand how to live healthily and how to stay safe in a variety of situations. Pupils generally enjoy school and have developed positive attitudes towards learning, including

independent and co-operative working. They understand the need for tolerance and understanding when dealing with others and display a good knowledge of other cultures and religions. The school encourages pupils to reflect on their actions and personal beliefs, thus strengthening their contribution to the local and wider communities. The school personnel have fostered an effective community in which pupils feel valued as individuals. Pupils are proud of their school and show a great deal of care for its building, equipment and resources. Pupils' readiness for the next stage in their learning and their working futures is satisfactory. The school has worked hard to engage both pupils and parents and as a result, attendance has improved and exclusions are rare. The majority of parents value the school's work and its leadership.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Strong features are the very comprehensive lesson plans, teachers' high expectations and the way pupils are encouraged to do their best and to take a full part in all class activities. Very effective teaching was observed in a Year 1 literacy lesson, where the use of drama and role-play, together with a clear emphasis on the development of specific vocabulary, was thoroughly enjoyed by pupils and they made very good gains in their understanding. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good support from teachers and their assistants which enables them to achieve their targets. However, the quality of teaching across the school is too variable. The best practice observed during the inspection is not shared sufficiently across all classes. When the pace of lessons slows, pupils sometimes lose interest quickly and their commitment to learning drops. Sometimes the work provided for pupils is not closely matched to their ability and prior attainment. The quality of marking and the way that pupils understand how to improve their work is not consistently satisfactory.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

This satisfactory curriculum is broad and balanced. It promotes pupils' personal and social development well and encourages their enjoyment of lessons. However, it has not yet resulted in consistent progress through the school. Planning is detailed and assessment data is used well to inform planning. Work has started to devise a more creative curriculum but plans are at a comparatively early stage. There is good provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The particular needs of these vulnerable pupils, and particularly those with emotional and social problems, are identified early and effectively met. A good range of intervention groups are provided to help these pupils fully access the curriculum. The curriculum is enhanced well through visits, visitors and a very good range of clubs. Music plays a key part in the school's life, and the two school choirs have a high profile in the community performing in and out of school. The school grounds are used well as an important part of the learning environment. For example, pupils helped to plant a mini orchard, as part of a joint community project and effectively use a garden area to produce fruit and vegetables to sell.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The pastoral care of pupils is a high priority which is effectively shared by all adults at the school. The care team have a wide variety of skills and approaches which are used effectively to ensure pupils develop confidence in themselves and a positive approach to their learning. The pupils are fully appreciative of the care they receive. One said, 'everyone is always there to care for you'. Academic guidance is satisfactory overall. There is good practice in all parts of the school but the use of assessment, including the marking of pupils' work to set challenging targets and support pupils' further learning, is inconsistent. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified effectively and benefit from a range of support. The good support they receive, the careful tracking of progress they make and the use of challenging targets ensure they make good progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher leads the school well and she is well supported by other school leaders. Roles and responsibilities are clear and the whole staff team shares a very clear vision for the future development of the school. Effective systems to monitor school effectiveness have been introduced, and enable the school to have a clear view of its strengths and weaknesses. The school has analysed its own community needs very effectively and has a clear view of its responsibilities in the local and wider community. In this respect, its contribution to community cohesion is good. The school improvement plan is detailed and comprehensive and is at the centre of the school's work, but lacks explicit reference in some areas to the drive to raise standards. The support of vulnerable pupils is a high priority and the management of provision for special educational needs is particularly effective. Governors support the school well and are developing their role as 'critical friends'. Leadership and management are only satisfactory overall, because processes have not yet impacted consistently in accelerating pupils' achievement. Improved standards in Year 6, particularly the challenge to more able pupils and the increased proportion reaching the higher Level 5, illustrate the school's good capacity for further improvement.

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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?	3
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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	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

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
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 eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

12 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Birchington Church of England Primary School, Birchington CT7 0AS

Thank you for making us so welcome when we came to the school recently to see how well you were doing. We enjoyed talking to you and seeing you at work and at play. Your school provides you with a satisfactory education and things are getting better rapidly.

Here are some of the best things about your school:

- The children in the Reception classes get off to a good start to their time at school.
- You enjoy school and value the contribution which the school makes to others in the village.
- Your behaviour and attitudes are good.
- Those of you who have difficulty in learning quickly are given good support.
- Your headteacher and other leaders have a clear view of how to make the school even better.

There are a few things that we think could be even better:

- Improve plans to make the school better and enable all of you to do as well as you can.
- Use information on how well you are doing to set work which is matched to your individual needs.

Thank you again for your welcome. We wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Paul Missin

Lead inspector