

Birchwood Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124681
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	328191
Inspection date	23 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Alan Lemon

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	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	190
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	Mrs Ruth Steggles
Headteacher	Mr S Cloke
Date of previous school inspection	14 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Valiant Road Martlesham Heath Ipswich Suffolk IP5 3SP
Telephone number	01473610701
Fax number	01473 636645

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS); the evidence of current pupils' progress; pupils' personal development and well-being; evidence of the impact on standards and achievement of recent developments in teaching and learning, and of the school's new leadership and management. Evidence was gathered from the observation of lessons, the pupils' work, discussions with them, members of the senior leadership team and the chair of the governing body, a scrutiny of school documents and parent questionnaires.

Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found the evidence to suggest that some of the school's own evaluations, as given in its self-evaluation form, were harsher than justified and these have been upgraded where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Birchwood Primary School is smaller than most primary schools and most of its pupils live in circumstances more favourable than average. Almost all the pupils are White British. Very few are from minority-ethnic backgrounds or at an early stage of English language acquisition. The proportion of pupils identified by the school as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The EYFS has 26 children in their Reception year. When they first start school, children's attainment is broadly in line with expectations for their age.

The school is an Eco School and has gained the prestigious Green Flag award, which symbolises excellence on the part of pupils in the field of environmental activity.

The headteacher left in February 2008, followed shortly afterwards by the Year 6 teacher who was also the manager of Key Stage 2. The deputy headteacher, who was acting headteacher from February 2008, has subsequently been appointed permanently to the post.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Birchwood Primary School is a good school because it possesses a great many positive qualities and few weaknesses. The school has successfully weathered the recent changes in school leadership. The headteacher is the driving force behind change and a real inspiration to the whole school. Staff, governors and parents fully support him in the direction he is setting. However, in terms of holding the school to account, governors have not kept up their training or sufficiently refined their skills to pursue critical questions about the school's performance. They are, nevertheless, a committed and able body who in many other ways give support to pupils, staff and parents.

Recent initiatives on the curriculum, teaching and self-evaluation have been implemented with good effect. Subject leaders are especially effective in coming up with good ideas to enrich the curriculum, and in planning and evaluating developments and steering them into practice. The able staff respond positively and adapt well to the new resources and approaches that are in place.

The curriculum is good and has been improved substantially, being strengthened in the provision for literacy, numeracy, science, and information and communication technology (ICT). Pupils like and value their work. Frequent experiments in science, such as dissolving, are popular. Training for parents on helping with their children's reading is proving a success in getting them more closely involved with the school. This support for parents, the Eco School project, links with neighbouring schools and participation in cultural events in the locality all contribute well in bringing the community closer together.

Pupils' achievement is good and standards are above average. Over several years standards in Years 1 and 2 have been broadly average. In 2007, Key Stage 1 results were a mixed picture. Higher-attaining pupils made good progress and achieved well above average standards in reading and were above in their writing and mathematics. Other pupils progressed satisfactorily in reading and writing, and achieved well in mathematics. The provisional test results in 2008 show overall improvement in reading and a significant rise in writing, indicating good achievement and above-average standards. By the end of Year 6, standards have usually been broadly average but, in 2007, higher-attaining pupils gained well above average results in English and mathematics. Early indications show that 2008 results were not as good for higher-attaining pupils in particular, although the proportion reaching the expected level was average. Overall, pupils performed best in science where standards were above average. The downturn reflects the impact of several changes of teacher for this particular group of pupils throughout Key Stage 2. The situation is now stable and the current Year 6 are making good progress. They are on track to achieve above-average standards by the end of this school year and are being prepared well for the future.

Pupils achieve well because teaching and learning are consistently good across the school. The school has introduced the Primary National Strategy effectively and training for staff on promoting good learning has been well received by them. With some urgency, the school improved how it tracks pupils' progress and has a rigorous and accurate system in place, which is raising standards and aims at bringing more consistency to results each year. While it is early days in running this, together with the new detailed planning format of what is taught, teaching in every lesson is sharply focused with clear learning objectives. Teachers pay close attention to what each pupil is capable of and each teacher has a good understanding of the point each

pupil is at in learning. The work planned for pupils is well matched to their needs and it has a variety that keeps them interested and engaged. ICT, which has had an injection of new resources, has a high profile in the classroom and is used effectively by staff and pupils. It gives pupils even more incentive to work hard and enjoy learning. Lessons have a good pace and work is challenging.

Pupils show good behaviour and regard for each other in their demeanour. They are happy and like school. They are sensible about staying safe and they show consideration for the safety of others. Attendance is good and pupils' comments on school are all positive. Staff actively seek pupils' views and take these seriously. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is important to the school and pupils make good progress in each aspect. Emphasis is given to pupils' learning about and respecting people's different cultures and beliefs. Pupils respond with interest and sensitivity. The school council actively contributes to school life, such as leading an assembly. Pupils all contribute well to the community in many other ways and, as an Eco School, they are very aware of environmental issues. Each individual takes great care to recycle and avoid waste. This links directly with their active pursuit of a healthy lifestyle. Pupils consciously choose healthy foods and take exercise, particularly through a wide interest in sports after school. Many pupils cycle and more walk to school with parents each day.

Staff care for and support pupils effectively. Adults have a good rapport with pupils and this encourages them in many positive ways. The arrangements for safeguarding pupils are robust. Pupils are well supported in making progress. They have a good range of challenging academic targets, which have been developed recently as a result of the closer tracking of progress. Pupils are convinced these are really benefiting them in the classroom. The marking of their work has also improved and is well focused on showing them what and how to improve. Pupils have commented that they find teachers' marking very helpful.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children really like coming to the Reception class. This is because their enjoyment in learning is given a very high priority. They settle quickly into school life because parent's knowledge of their children is used effectively by the staff. Children's personal development is good because staff guide and manage them very thoughtfully. Their behaviour is good and they are very keen to learn as a result of the effective support given by the teachers and teaching assistant. Children from all backgrounds work agreeably together. Children adopt healthy lifestyles effectively because they are encouraged to eat fruit every day and have taught-exercise sessions at least twice a week. They achieve well and standards are slightly above average in most areas of learning by the end of the Reception year because staff successfully help children to develop basic skills. The school's leadership recognised that children's calculation skills were below average in the 2008 assessments, and plans to enhance the use of resources and opportunities for children to develop these key skills. Children have opportunities to choose inside and outside activities for themselves because resources are organised satisfactorily. Planning for all areas of learning is effective in setting clear objectives and recording the next steps that children will take. Assessment activities are carried out well. Books and folders successfully record children's development in all areas. The leadership of this stage of education is good because children's progress is accurately assessed and educational provision is regularly evaluated. As a result, a good plan of action is in place which lays out valuable key priorities for future development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards of calculation in the Reception class by ensuring that resources are always used effectively in both the outside and inside learning areas.
- Ensure governors develop an effective role in holding the school to account for its performance, particularly in relation to pupils' standards and achievement.

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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 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?	2
The standards ¹ 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

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	2
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	2
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	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

24 September 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Birchwood Primary School, Martlesham Heath, IP5 3SP

Many thanks to you all for making our visit to your school so enjoyable and worthwhile. We greatly appreciated the opportunities to talk to you about work and school, and a special thanks to the small group of pupils who met with me to share their views.

We were pleased to hear the many good things you had to say about your school and that you are happy with the changes that have taken place recently. You picked out your targets and the marking of your work as good features and we think you are right. By the end of the day we were in full agreement with you that Birchwood is a good school.

Your teachers are right to be proud of you because, as we saw, you behave well, your attendance is good, you enjoy your work and make good efforts to do well. We think the standard of your work is good and you are achieving well. All of your teachers are good at their jobs and this has a lot to do with your success. Of course this goes for all the children in Reception year as well, but we have asked that they get extra help in learning to calculate with numbers.

We have not needed to point out much that needs improvement in school and your headteacher already knows what needs doing. We have seen that he, with good support from all staff, is making Birchwood even better. It is good to see that your teachers ask for, and take your ideas seriously. We have said your school governors should help the headteacher even more by keeping a close eye on how well the school is doing and by making sure it is doing the best it can.

We wish you all every success for the future.

Alan Lemon

Lead inspector