

Birchwood Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117069
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	338940
Inspection dates	25–26 February 2010
Reporting inspector	Denise Morris

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

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3–4
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	119
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue Jones
Headteacher	Alexandra Taylor
Date of previous school inspection	21 May 2007
School address	The Birchway Crawford Road Hatfield
Telephone number	01707 262648
Fax number	01707 264580
Email address	Head@birchwoodchildrenscentre.herts.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Approximately 60% of time was spent looking at learning in 14 sessions. All teachers and support staff were seen working with children. Inspectors observed the school's work and the child care provision, which is managed by the governing body. Meetings were held with children, staff and governors. Inspectors looked at children's profiles, curriculum plans and the school development plan, and scrutinised 38 parental questionnaires. The inspection team looked in detail at the following:

how well the different needs and abilities of all groups of children are catered for

- how well leaders monitor the provision to ensure that all children reach their potential
- how well children are encouraged to learn about other communities that are different from their own.

Information about the school

This is a large school. The Early Years Foundation Stage comprises of a Children's Centre in which there is full day care for children under the age of three, a playgroup for pre-nursery children, wrap-around care for children of three to four years, and a nursery school for children of three and four. Most children are White British. A small proportion of children are from minority ethnic backgrounds and some are in the early stages of learning to speak English. A few children come from traveller communities. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is about average. The Children's Centre provides a breakfast club, an after-school club and holiday services. Childcare is available for 50 weeks a year. There are support groups for parents, carers and children.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

This is an outstanding school. It provides a rich and stimulating environment in which all children thrive. It has grown rapidly in recent years and the excellent provision identified at the time of the last inspection has been maintained and is still clearly evident.

Exceptional relationships with parents and carers ensure that they are full partners in their children's learning. The continuing success of the nursery is a result of inspirational leadership by the headteacher and senior managers. Together they are fully focused on promoting children's development and raising standards in all areas of learning. Staff show an excellent commitment to the children, their families and to improving provision. Outstanding induction procedures ensure that children quickly settle and develop excellent attitudes to learning. Their behaviour is outstanding. As a result the school and the childcare settings all have a calm and harmonious atmosphere.

During their time at the school children make exceptional progress in all areas of learning. This leads to above average attainment by the time they leave. A few children do particularly well in their personal and social development. The very high focus placed on the individual needs of children leads to all groups achieving equally well. Those with special educational needs and/or disabilities succeed because of high quality support from a wide range of school and external support services. Children who speak English as an additional language also achieve well, as do those from traveller communities. Children in the playgroup and the under threes nursery are cared for extremely well so that they are happy and enjoy their time at the centre. They make some very good progress. The care, support and guidance provided by the school and in the childcare facility are outstanding. Safeguarding procedures are rigorous, ensuring that all groups of children are safe and secure.

A rich and stimulating curriculum and consistently high quality teaching and support are the main reasons why children achieve extremely well in all areas of the provision. The strong ethos ensures that children feel very safe and are happy to come to school. They make a particularly strong contribution to the community and regularly take part in charity fundraising. For example, they talked excitedly about the 'funny hats' they made to raise money for the recent earthquake in Haiti. Children's achievements are regularly monitored and staff undertake numerous formal observations to check that each child is making good progress. These observations are not always recorded and this leads to inconsistent evidence of children's individual successes in making progress, particularly in communication, language and literacy.

Leaders are rigorous in monitoring the provision, and in providing high quality feedback to staff and wide-ranging training to improve their skills. New ways for monitoring and checking how well the nursery and the childcare provision are doing and identifying

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what could be done better have been developed since the last inspection. The recent establishment of a playgroup on site is evidence of leaders' commitment to raising standards and improving children's attainment on entry to the nursery. These actions reflect the consistent drive for improvement and indicate an excellent capacity for sustained improvement. Self-evaluation is regular and accurate. Governors are very supportive and fully involved in the work of the school. They are rightly aware that they do not yet take a sufficiently active role in challenging leaders about their decisions.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the consistency with which teachers and support staff record formal observations, particularly of children's language and communication skills.
 - Improve the level of challenge offered by the governing body by involving them more fully in decision-making.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of children**1**

Children really enjoy coming to the centre. They enter every day eager to find out about the exciting activities on offer. They quickly settle and develop very high quality social skills as they work and play together. This was particularly evident in one work-base where children of three and four were playing in the hospital. Three boys used the stethoscope correctly to listen to each other's heartbeats. They showed high levels of empathy to the child who was the 'patient'. Similarly, in the playgroup children worked together very well as they explored miniature models of people, some of which represented disabled people. One boy asked why a man had a white stick. When the teacher explained that the man couldn't see very well, the boy replied, 'Oh dear.' Children make excellent progress in all aspects of learning. As a result they consistently improve their skills and the work seen during the inspection by many pupils was on track to reach or exceed their expected levels, especially in their personal, social and emotional development. They show a very good understanding of how to keep healthy and safe. They eat a wide range of vegetables at lunchtime and choose from many different fruits for their snacks. They value the exciting outdoor areas, which provide daily opportunities for them to extend their physical skills as they climb on the apparatus, ride around the track or dig in the large sand pit. Children themselves used their voice to encourage the building of a tree house, which they really enjoy. Their most recent request is for a jungle garden, which staff have begun to develop. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Those from different ethnic groups work and play very well together and all attend school regularly. A good range of basic skills ensures that children are well prepared for their future lives.

These are the grades for children's outcomes

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Children's achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account: Children's attainment ¹	2
The quality of children's learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which children feel safe	1
Children's behaviour	1
The extent to which children adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which children contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which children develop skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Children's attendance ¹	2
The extent of children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

An exciting range of activities, which motivate and interest all groups of children and extend their understanding of the wider world, ensure that they enjoy their learning. The addition of the 'Forest School' for the older children provides many opportunities for them to learn about outdoor life and working together. Improvements in teaching, such as training by the speech therapist on how to improve questioning skills and in signing to aid children's understanding of language, have ensured that the quality of provision remains very high. Strong relationships between all groups of staff and exemplary behaviour management are having a very positive impact on outcomes for children. The use of learning portfolios is a strength helping staff to keep track of children's progress as part of the new rigorous assessment system right across the centre. This is started for the youngest children in the childcare provision and passed on to the playgroup and then to the nursery so that staff can track individual progress over time. Staff undertake regular informal and formal observations, which are recorded to provide an overview of each child's progress. Some observations, particularly those in language and communication, are not recorded as regularly as other more visual observations such as in practical activities like painting and building. As a result it is more difficult for leaders to track progress in this area. The quality and use of resources is a major strength. For example, children showed high levels of empathy and interest as they washed the shells of large snails and compared them with other types of shell. The quality of care, guidance and support for all groups of children is very high, and the welfare needs of the youngest two year olds meet their individual needs particularly effectively. As a

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result all children, including those who attend the very good breakfast club and after-school club, are happy, safe and secure.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets children's needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has an exceptionally clear vision for the future of the school and has embedded many improvements since the last inspection. Improved assessment and tracking procedures, increased training for staff and development of the playgroup are all testament to leaders' ongoing commitment to improving the school. Governors are rigorous in ensuring that children and staff are safe and secure and meet their statutory duties effectively. Safeguarding arrangements, including child protection procedures, are excellent. Governors are exceptionally supportive of the school and know its strengths. They have very productive relationships with parents. They tackle weaknesses effectively but are not regularly involved in making decisions or challenging leaders. They ensure that there are equal opportunities for all children and are rigorous at eliminating discrimination. As a result all groups have access to all that the provision offers and achieve equally well. Links with parents, the community and local schools are excellent, resulting in additional experiences for children and very good transition arrangements. Leaders have a clear understanding of community cohesion and the school's strategy, though not yet complete, is developing well. Local links are excellent and links with the wider world, such as with a school in Kenya, are helping to extend children's awareness of other cultures. The nursery benefits from a very wide range of good quality and often innovative resources which support children's learning extremely well.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1

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The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

Parents are exceptionally supportive of the school and greatly value the childcare provision. Almost all parents who responded to the inspection questionnaires said that their child likes school and that it keeps them safe and secure. Parents are very pleased with the provision. 'Year after year the nursery provides an excellent education and safeguard for my children,' wrote one parent. 'The nursery is fantastic. The staff promote a very happy environment and encourage very high learning opportunities while catering for all the children's individual needs,' wrote another.

A few parents feel that they do not receive enough information about their child's progress, but this view was not supported by inspection evidence. During the inspection an interview between nursery staff and a parent showed how closely and effectively the school works with parents in supporting their children. Targets for future development were discussed and the child's portfolio of achievements was shared. The school holds regular interactive open sessions for parents and there are many 'home packs' available, with instruction sheets that go home with children regularly.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of children registered at Birchwood Nursery School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 38 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 119 children registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	33	87	5	13	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	32	84	6	16	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	28	74	9	24	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	25	66	12	32	1	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	30	79	8	21	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	23	61	11	29	4	11	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	25	66	13	34	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	24	63	13	34	1	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	24	63	14	37	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	23	61	12	3	1	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	24	63	12	32	2	5	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	29	76	5	13	2	5	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	32	84	5	13	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its children's needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its children well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its children.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its children. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a child in their learning and development.
Attainment:	in other phases of school, for example primary schools, attainment is the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons. However, there is no national average for three- and four-year-olds. Therefore, in inspections of nursery schools, inspectors take account of expectations in the age-related bands of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well children acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of children. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets children's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which children are learning in nursery sessions and over longer periods of time.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



1 March 2010

Dear Children

Inspection of Birchwood Nursery School, Hatfield AL10 0PD

Thank you for your help when we visited your school last week. This letter is to tell you all the things we found out about your school.

Your school and the childcare at The Birches are excellent and this helps you to do very well in your learning.

You all behave very well and you play together happily.

You told us that you enjoy all the activities that you do at school.

Your teachers and other staff are kind and helpful.

You know all about keeping fit and healthy and you told us that you feel really safe at school.

We really liked the way that you collected money for the earthquake in Haiti. It sounds like you had lots of fun making your hats.

You all enjoy playing outdoors.

Your school's leaders keep you safe and secure.

We are asking your leaders to do two things to help you learn even better.

Make sure that all the things you do are written down by your teachers, so they know exactly how well you are getting on.

Make sure that the governors are able to ask lots of questions about what happens at school.

You can help by making sure that you show your work to your teachers every day and by talking to them about the things you do.

Thank you again for talking to us.

Yours sincerely,

Denise Morris

Lead Inspector

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