

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Birch Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

School Hill, Birch, Colchester, Essex CO2 0LZ

Inspection date: 25 February 2025

Outcome

Birch Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils attend a school where kindness and compassion are displayed in abundance. Friendships blossom between pupils of all ages. Older pupils keep a close eye on their younger peers in the playground, involving those of all ages in games, chatting and fun. Pupils know that when the fun stops and work begins, they need to work hard in class. They try their best and learn well because staff have high expectations.

Pupils behave extremely well. They are polite, friendly and welcoming to new pupils who join the school. The youngest children in Reception know and follow the class routines. They move from task to task quickly and with a real purpose. Children in Reception share equipment and resources with one another with ease.

There are wide ranging opportunities woven through the school for pupils to develop their understanding of the world. Many of these are skilfully used to further develop pupils' knowledge in specific subjects. Older pupils relish the opportunity to increase plastic recycling by setting up their 'Eco-Bubbles' company, selling bubble bath and shower gel to the school community. Opportunities such as these help pupils become responsible, active citizens of the future as they leave at the end of Year 6.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Pupils benefit from a well-designed curriculum, that is delivered effectively by teachers. The careful design means that pupils learn important knowledge in a sensible order. They develop a detailed understanding of, for example, mathematical concepts because new learning builds on what they already know. Teachers use assessment wisely to make

changes to the curriculum if a pupil misunderstands or needs more support. This is especially the case for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff have an accurate understanding of the needs of pupils with SEND. This means the work these pupils do helps them to achieve well.

The school's work to help pupils learn to read results in almost all pupils being fluent and confident readers in their first few years in school. The small number who need further support receive this from staff who are expert in teaching reading. This helps less confident readers to catch up quickly. Children in Reception are immersed in stories, rhymes and poems. They learn and use more words because staff are skilled at modelling language and helping children apply their new learning in class.

Leaders at all levels take the right action at the right time to continue to improve the school. The published outcomes in 2024 are not indicative of the quality of education pupils in school receive now. Leaders' accurate view of the strengths and areas for development mean that the changes they make benefit pupils to learn and develop well. The school has recently refined the approach to the teaching of writing. This effective work is paying dividends with younger pupils, but some older pupils have gaps in their knowledge around aspects such as grammar and punctuation. This means that some pupils do not produce writing of the quality they could.

Over the past few years, pupils' attendance has been high, and this remains the case. The school keeps a close eye on attendance. It steps in swiftly if a pupil starts to miss too much school. This helps pupils to attend very well.

Children in the Reception class are guided to develop independence well. Staff know the need of individuals and provide the right support for children's emotional needs. This results in children making friends quickly and being happy in their environment. Consequently, children in Reception are well prepared as they start their journey through school.

The established personal, social and health education programme enables pupils to develop as individuals. They gain a secure grounding in aspects such as relationships, difference between themselves and others, and how to stay safe. Getting outdoors is important to pupils. They benefit from time in the forest area, where from the youngest to oldest, pupils are guided to take well-calculated risks.

Staff are incredibly proud to work in this school. They value the training and support that they receive to keep their practice sharp. In turn, pupils benefit from working with motivated and dedicated staff.

The board of governors hold an accurate view of the performance of the school. The board remains strategic in its work, keeping a close eye on how the school is doing. The governing board provides effective challenge and support to leaders in appropriate measures.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's approach to teaching writing is not fully established. This means that some older pupils do not have the depth of knowledge they need to write as well as they could. The school should continue to provide teachers with the skills and knowledge to fully implement its approach to teaching writing.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in December 2019.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	115138
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10366645
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	132
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Anthony Scrafton
Headteacher	Rebekah May
Website	www.birch.essex.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	3 and 4 December 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The headteacher took up her role in September 2023.
- The school does not currently make use of any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, other senior leaders and a range of other school staff. Inspectors held meetings with members of the governing board, and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including, attendance records, pupil records, records of governing board meetings, school development plans and school self-evaluation documents.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View, and Ofsted's online staff survey.

Inspection team

Nathan Lowe, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Jackie Mullan

Ofsted Inspector

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