

Birches Green Infant School

Birches Green Road, Erdington, Birmingham, West Midlands B24 9SR

Inspection dates

13–14 December 2016

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The quality of teaching across key stage 1 is inconsistent. As a result, pupils do not achieve sufficiently high outcomes by the time they leave the school at the end of Year 2.
- Teachers do not have sufficiently high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Too often, they set tasks that are too easy for pupils, especially the most able pupils. As a result, too few pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, reach the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Teachers are not fully accurate in their assessment practice. Consequently, they underestimate the progress that pupils are making and plan and teach activities that are not accurately matched to the needs of the pupils.
- Teachers do not provide pupils with enough opportunities to use and apply their mathematical knowledge in problem-solving that requires them to think deeply.
- While school leaders recognise that the curriculum does not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to deepen their learning across all subjects, they have not yet fully embedded the necessary changes to enable pupils to make good progress across all subjects.
- There is some variability in teachers' subject knowledge across the curriculum. As a result, there are occasions when pupils are not provided with sufficient opportunities to extend their learning in subjects such as history, geography and science.

The school has the following strengths

- The recently appointed headteacher provides strong and effective leadership. Under the new leadership, the school is starting to improve, although the impact on teaching and outcomes is at an early stage.
- Children make good progress from their starting points in the early years provision. Teaching is good in the Nursery and Reception classes.
- Pupils' behaviour is good in school. Pupils feel safe and secure, and show consideration for other people.
- Governors have a clear and accurate view of the school's strengths and where it needs to improve further.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that it is consistently good across key stage 1 by ensuring that teachers:
 - have sufficiently high expectations of all pupils, especially the most able, including those who are disadvantaged, and set suitably challenging learning activities
 - provide pupils with opportunities to apply their mathematical skills and knowledge in solving problems using reasoning
 - have secure knowledge and skills to teach all subjects effectively
 - are accurate in their assessments of pupils' progress and use the information to plan and teach lessons that are matched to pupils' abilities.
- Further improve leadership and management by ensuring that the curriculum provides pupils with a wider range of opportunities to extend their basic skills across all subjects.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher has, since taking up the post in September 2016, quickly and accurately identified where improvements need to take place in the school. She recognised that outcomes for pupils have fallen over the past two years and has taken swift and effective action to address this decline. She has identified where teaching is not effective and has provided well-judged support to enable teachers to learn from good or outstanding teaching, both within the school and at other local schools. While improvements are emerging, there has been insufficient time to see the impact on improving teaching and pupils' outcomes.
- The headteacher has established a clear vision, based on high expectations for all members of the school community. Her belief that all pupils should achieve success in all areas of school life is shared by other leaders, who are being provided with increasing opportunities to bring about improvements within their areas of responsibility. An example of this is the recently revised approach to the teaching of writing. This places a far greater emphasis on allowing pupils to talk about what they are going to write and to then put these thoughts into practice in their written work. This is leading to pupils making more rapid progress in this area of their learning.
- The headteacher and other leaders have ensured that the school is a calm and well-ordered place where pupils feel secure. Pupils are clear about the behaviour expectations that the headteacher has established and, as a result, incidents of inappropriate behaviour are now extremely rare.
- Leaders have secure and robust systems in place to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of all aspects of the school's work. The headteacher has developed opportunities for all leaders within school to be involved in monitoring teaching and learning. She has worked alongside subject leaders to ensure that they have the necessary skills and confidence to be accurate in their evaluations. As a result, there is now a far more realistic view of the quality of teaching across the school and a clear recognition of how outcomes for pupils can be improved.
- Strong and effective action has been taken to address the less effective teaching in school. The revised and improved systems that have been put in place for managing teachers' performance place a far more demanding emphasis on pupils making at least good progress and achieving the standards that are appropriate for their age. Teachers are held accountable for the progress of the pupils in their classes. Leaders ensure that teachers are provided with a range of well-judged professional development opportunities, including support to improve subject knowledge.
- Leaders have ensured that the additional funding that the school receives is used effectively and appropriately. An assistant headteacher has responsibility for the use of pupil premium funding and monitors the progress of disadvantaged pupils in school. She oversees the work of additional teachers and teaching assistants who provide small-group and one-to-one support for pupils. She ensures that interventions are well planned and match the needs of the individual pupils. This is helping to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make at least the same progress as their classmates.

- The leader of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is effective in making sure that the specific requirements of these pupils are accurately identified. She works closely with outside agencies to ensure that specialist support and advice is provided as appropriate, to allow these pupils to close gaps in their learning.
- Leaders place a high emphasis on ensuring that pupils are healthy and have access to good-quality physical education and games teaching. Leaders plan carefully to ensure that the additional sports funding is used effectively to broaden the range of sporting opportunities available to the pupils and to support their well-being. All pupils in school take part in twice weekly games and physical education lessons. Teachers have received training to develop their skills in teaching specific activities, such as gymnastics and dance. Particular emphasis is placed on encouraging pupils who are at risk of future health concerns to attend after-school clubs and activities to help them to achieve a healthy lifestyle.
- While leaders have planned the school curriculum to make sure that all the requirements of the national curriculum are met, they are aware that teaching in some subjects is not as effective as it could be. The topics and themes that the pupils follow, such as 'Paws, Claws and Whiskers' and 'Castles' engage pupils' interest and are enhanced by trips and visits. However, opportunities for pupils to extend their learning in science, history and geography are not fully developed and this limits pupils' progress in these subjects. Leaders have recognised that this is an area that they need to develop and are looking at strong practice in other schools to identify how further improvements can be made.
- Pupils are provided with good opportunities to extend and enrich their learning through a range of extra-curricular activities, including music, drama and sports clubs. All pupils in Year 2 are offered the opportunity to take part in a two-day residential trip to Conover Hall in Shropshire to participate in a range of outdoor activities that help promote team-building and self-confidence. These opportunities support pupils' personal development and have a positive impact on their progress.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well supported in school. Pupils from a wide range of religious and cultural backgrounds are encouraged to develop an understanding of other people's beliefs and to take part in celebrations of different religious festivals, including Diwali, Eid and Christmas. During the inspection, pupils from across the school were observed enthusiastically taking part in a nativity performance and gaining delight from performing seasonal songs. This aspect of the school's work is successful in developing pupils' understanding of key British values, including respect and tolerance.
- Parents express strong confidence in the work of the school. All parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, would recommend the school. The view expressed that 'This is a unique school with a family ethos' was representative of many others spoken to during the inspection. Parents also commented positively on the impact that the headteacher has had since she was appointed.
- The local authority has not, until recently, recognised that outcomes at the school were not good enough. During this term, representatives from the local authority's commissioned support service have identified the need to provide more challenge and support and have developed a plan to work alongside school leaders to bring about

improvements. However, this has not yet been implemented and it is therefore not possible to identify what impact it will have.

Governance of the school

- Governance of the school is now strong and demanding. The governing body was reconstituted in 2014 and now provides high levels of challenge and support.
- The recently appointed chair of governors uses his professional expertise to incisively analyse the range of internal and external information available to the school and to compare its performance with other schools nationally. Governors are aware that outcomes have fallen over the past two years and ask searching questions of school leaders about how improvements in teaching and outcomes for pupils can be achieved.
- Governors were proactive in ensuring that they made the right appointment to the post of headteacher and carried out a rigorous appointment process. They have high expectations of the headteacher and other leaders.
- Governors have a good understanding of how the resources that are available to the school are used and their impact on pupils' outcomes. They also have a strong awareness of the particular needs of the local community and are determined that the school provides parents with a school that they can have confidence in. They have helped to ensure that the culture of the school prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain. Governors ensure that leaders and other staff help pupils reflect fundamental values of respect and tolerance through their everyday lives.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have ensured that all staff are fully aware of their responsibilities to keep pupils safe and secure. School office staff are diligent in checking visitors to the school and maintain a detailed record of all safeguarding checks relating to staff.
- Training in safeguarding is thorough and regular. Staff have all received training on their responsibilities in combatting extremism or the threat of radicalisation. There is a robust system of leadership of safeguarding that helps to ensure that there is always an appropriately trained senior leader available at the school to deal with any safeguarding concerns that are raised about pupils.
- The school works closely and effectively with outside agencies to provide support to vulnerable or at-risk pupils and their families. Record-keeping is meticulous and identifies the support that pupils should receive. Where support is not forthcoming, school staff quickly and tenaciously press for appropriate action.
- Pupils are well supported in understanding how to keep themselves safe. Pupils' use of the internet is closely monitored to make sure that they cannot access inappropriate material.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement as there is a lack of consistently good teaching across key stage 1. Despite the changes that the new leadership team have implemented, too

often the teaching does not accurately meet the needs of the pupils and, as a result, pupils do not achieve sufficiently high outcomes in all subjects.

- Teachers' expectations of what pupils can and should achieve are not high enough. Evidence gathered during the inspection, including from observations in lessons, scrutiny of pupils' work and discussions with pupils, indicates that too frequently the tasks that teachers set for pupils are too easy and do not challenge pupils to think deeply. This is particularly the case for the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged.
- There is a clear and established assessment policy in school but, while teachers generally follow this, inaccuracies in assessments mean that teachers do not have a clear understanding of the progress that pupils are making. This means that they consequently do not set work that is matched appropriately to the needs of the pupils in the class.
- There is a strong focus on teaching pupils the basic skills in mathematics, such as addition and subtraction. While this aspect of teaching is generally effective, teachers do not provide pupils with enough opportunities for them to apply their mathematical knowledge to problem-solving using reasoning. There is also a lack of consistently strong subject knowledge, with teachers not identifying pupils' misconceptions and allowing inaccuracy in their work.
- Teachers do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to extend their learning across all subjects. This is particularly the case in science, history and geography. Pupils are not provided with sufficient opportunities for investigative work or to undertake in-depth research, linked to the topics they are studying.
- The teaching of writing has improved and pupils are enthusiastic about the opportunities they have to apply their knowledge of spelling, punctuation and grammar in extended and relevant pieces of work. For example, during the inspection, pupils in Year 2 were observed writing a set of instructions on how to make a sandwich. This linked well to the practical activity they took part in the following day of preparing food for their Christmas party. Effective additional support was provided for the less able pupils that helped them to undertake and make progress in the same activity.
- The teaching of phonics within reading is effective. There is a whole-school approach to this aspect of the teaching of reading. Teachers and teaching assistants are accurate in ensuring that pupils have a clear understanding of the sounds that letters make in words and can then apply this knowledge to reading unfamiliar words. Pupils are encouraged to read at home and books are well matched to the different abilities of the pupils.
- There is a strong and well-established focus on providing pupils with opportunities to extend their learning in and around the school grounds. Pupils take part in weekly outdoor learning sessions, including growing vegetables and fruit in the school allotments. These sessions help pupils develop a good understanding of the natural environment and support their understanding of the need for a healthy diet.
- Teaching assistants provide effective support to individuals and small groups of pupils. They work in partnership with teachers and are involved in planning tasks for the pupils they support. They provide particularly effective support to pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. They provide clear instructions for these pupils and break learning activities down into achievable stages.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are polite, caring and considerate individuals. They demonstrate good manners and remember to say 'please' and 'thank you'. They understand the need to listen attentively when other people are speaking.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. Visits from the police provide pupils with valuable information on the dangers they could face in society and the need to be careful about who they talk to. They understand that while computers are a valuable part of their lives, there are also potential dangers in using the internet.
- The school provides pupils with good opportunities to take on responsibility. Pupils value the opportunity to be elected as class representatives on the school council and make secure links with the democratic process in this country. They undertake their roles as peer mentors on the playgrounds conscientiously and work well with staff to resolve any disagreements that occur between their fellow pupils.
- Pupils say that there is very little bullying in school. They understand that their actions can have a negative impact on others and recognise that inappropriate language can be distressing and upsetting. Pupils spoken to during the inspection were confident that if bullying were to occur, it would be dealt with swiftly and effectively by all members of staff.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils behave well both in classrooms and on the playgrounds. During the inspection, pupils were understandably very excited by the end-of-term Christmas activities that were taking place in school, but still maintained positive behaviour at all times.
- Pupils demonstrate good attitudes towards their learning. Occasionally, when teaching is less engaging, some pupils lose attention. However, they do not tend to misbehave or prevent other pupils from learning.
- The systems that the school has put in place for monitoring behaviour are effective and thorough. School records indicate that, while there have been some incidents of inappropriate behaviour by a very small number of pupils, the actions that school leaders have taken have been swift, appropriate and effective.
- Attendance has improved over the past year and is now broadly in line with the national average. The school works closely with parents to ensure that pupils attend regularly and on time, and makes good use of a family liaison officer, who works across four local schools, to follow up and address any issues of irregular attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Outcomes in reading writing and mathematics have fallen over the past two years. Provisional assessment information for 2016 indicates that, while attainment was

broadly in line with the national average, too few pupils in Year 2 had made the expected progress in these subjects from their starting point. This was particularly the case for the most able pupils. Outcomes for pupils by the time they leave the school at the end of Year 2 and move on to the next stage of their education are too low. Early indications are that the new leadership team has acted swiftly to prevent any further decline.

- In 2016, the proportion of pupils who were working at greater depth was below the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. No disadvantaged pupils were working at greater depth in any of these subjects. The majority of the most able pupils in school do not make the progress expected of them from their starting points in school.
- The progress of pupils currently in school is not consistently good across classes. Evidence gathered during the inspection, including from the school's own assessment information, indicates that pupils' progress is lowest in mathematics. Progress is stronger in reading and writing across the school.
- Pupils' outcomes in other subjects, including science, history and geography, require improvement. Pupils do not make expected progress in these subjects as the expectations for what they should achieve are not demanding enough.
- In both 2015 and 2016, pupils' outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check were in line with the national average. This is a result of the systematic and whole-school approach that is in place for ensuring that pupils develop a secure understanding of sounds within words. This helps less able pupils to develop secure reading skills. Pupils develop good skills in reading fluently and with expression, especially the most able pupils. Some of the most able pupils spoken to by inspectors commented upon the fact that they would like to read more difficult books.
- Disadvantaged pupils make progress that is in line with other pupils in school. Evidence gathered during the inspection shows that the additional support that these pupils receive helps diminish differences in their outcomes compared with other pupils nationally. Leaders ensure that pupil premium funding is used appropriately to support the needs of disadvantaged pupils.
- A relatively high proportion of pupils enter school speaking English as an additional language. Teachers and other staff ensure that good opportunities are created for these pupils to develop their spoken language. Pupils from minority ethnic groups make the same progress as other pupils in school.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive appropriate and effective support, and this helps them make good progress towards achieving their individual targets.

Early years provision

Good

- The majority of children start at school with skills and knowledge that are below those that are typical for their age, with some children well below. As a result of good teaching and a clear focus on developing skills across all areas of learning, children make good progress across the early years provision. By the time they leave Reception, the majority of children are well prepared to start in Year 1.

- Outcomes in early years have risen over the past two years. In 2016, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development was in line with the national average. Children attained well in all areas of learning. Due to the strong focus on developing children's spoken language, progress in this area is particularly strong. Teachers and other staff use questioning effectively and encourage children to answer in increasingly extended sentences. All adults demonstrate correct use of language well and this helps children, particularly those for whom English is an additional language, to become confident in communication.
- The teaching of early reading is good. Children are supported effectively in their development of phonics through regular, well-planned and well-taught activities that systematically build their knowledge of sounds and how they can be used to form words. Children then apply these skills to spell words and rapidly develop skills in writing. Teachers and teaching assistants have high expectations of the children and, as a result, children understand the need for accurate punctuation in writing from an early age.
- Both the indoor and outdoor classrooms are lively and attractive places that actively encourage learning. Areas are set up successfully to engage children's interest and to allow them to pursue their interests. For example, during the inspection, children in Reception listened attentively while the teacher explained the range of learning activities that were available, including writing and mathematics tasks. Children quickly chose which activity they wanted to follow and showed sustained attention and application. This helped in their development of writing well-formed sentences and accurate counting skills.
- Leadership of the early years provision is good. The leader has a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for further development across Nursery and Reception, gained from regular and thorough monitoring and evaluation. She ensures that assessment is used well to track children's progress and to adapt teaching to meet the changing needs of children as they develop. When children first start in Nursery, assessments are carried out quickly so that learning can begin as soon as possible.
- Strong and productive links with outside agencies, including speech and language support and the school nursing service, are firmly in place and these are used well to support children's particular needs. The pupil premium funding is used well to provide additional support for disadvantaged children and this helps them to make good progress.
- Expectations of behaviour are high across the early years provision and, as a result, children show consideration for each other. The strong emphasis that all staff place on ensuring that children are safe and secure results in a caring and nurturing environment. All statutory requirements are met.
- Parents are seen as essential partners in their children's learning and speak positively about the work that staff do with their children. The early years leader rightly recognises that there is still work to do to fully involve parents in their children's learning and is developing this aspect of the early years provision.
- The most able children in early years are provided with additional challenge in some of their learning. However, as in key stage 1, some opportunities are missed to ensure that these children are provided with sufficiently demanding activities.

School details

Unique reference number	103169
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10019500

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3 to 7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	242
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Colin Turner
Headteacher	Anna Stevenson
Telephone number	0121 464 4310
Website	www.birchgni.bham.sch.uk/
Email address	enquiry@birchgni.bham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	18–19 October 2011

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- Birches Green Infant School is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils, those who are supported by the pupil premium funding, is above average.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is above that in most schools. The largest minority group are of Pakistani heritage.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is slightly above the national average.
- A before- and after-school club operates on the school site. It is not managed by the governors and is inspected separately.

- The headteacher took up her post in September 2016. All the staff who teach in key stage 1 have been appointed within the last two years.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed pupils' learning in 15 lessons or parts of lesson. A number of these observations were undertaken with the headteacher and the assistant headteachers.
- The inspectors looked at work in pupils' books and listened to pupils read. They met with a group of pupils, including members of the school council. The inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime, lunchtime and at the end of the school day, as well as in lessons.
- The inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including assessments and records of pupils' progress; the school's checks and records relating to safeguarding; child protection and attendance; records of how teaching is managed and the school improvement plans.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the two assistant headteachers and two middle leaders. The lead inspector met with three members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body, and had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority's commissioned support.
- The inspectors took account of the 16 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and considered the six free text responses from parents. They also talked to parents at the start of the school day. They also considered the 21 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Adam Hewett, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Melanie Callaghan-Lewis	Ofsted Inspector
Alison Broomfield	Ofsted Inspector

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