

Birches Green Infant School

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

Inspection dates

2–3 July 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher has addressed the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection with admirable directness. As a result, the quality of teaching and pupils' progress have markedly improved.
- Teachers set work that builds effectively on what pupils can already do. They question pupils effectively to check their understanding and extend their thinking.
- Pupils' learning of mathematics in particular has advanced. They think about how they can answer questions, and can explain their approaches.
- Phonics is taught well. In recent years, the proportion of pupils that have met the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check has been at or above the national average.
- Leaders and governors have designed a strong curriculum, which ensures that pupils gain knowledge and skills effectively in many subjects. Teaching in music requires improvement.
- Occasionally, the most able pupils complete too much routine work before moving on to tasks that really make them think.
- Pupils' attendance is improving, but remains below the national average.
- Since the last inspection, the proportion of pupils attaining the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics has been above average.
- Good teaching in the early years ensures that children make strong progress. Those who enter the school with lower starting points catch up quickly.
- Safeguarding is effective. Staff know the pupils very well, and identify any concerns or additional needs promptly. They work resourcefully to overcome any obstacles to pupils' learning.
- Pupils have very good attitudes towards school. They are enthusiastic learners who want to learn more. They behave consistently well in the classroom and the playground.
- Middle leaders make an effective contribution to the running of the school. However, some do not have the strategic command of their area to enable them to contribute fully to its development.
- Training has enabled teaching assistants to enhance their skills. However, on occasion they do not have the best possible impact on pupils' progress.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, by:
 - ensuring that staff are always alert to the potential of the most able pupils and set them suitably challenging work
 - revising the curriculum and the arrangements for the teaching of music.
- Extend the impact of leadership and management, by:
 - ensuring that middle leaders are enabled to take a strategic view of the subjects on aspects of the school's work for which they are responsible
 - making sure that the training of teaching assistants gives them the knowledge and skills they require to be successful at all the tasks they perform.
- Increase the rate of pupils' attendance to at least the national average by working intensively with the parents whose children are frequently absent.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher has demonstrated commendable skill and persistence in improving the school. Using the weaknesses from the last inspection as a starting point, she has taken actions that have led directly to significant improvement. At the same time, she has checked on the detailed impact of the changes she has introduced, and modified her plans when necessary. For example, leaders have adapted schemes of work to ensure that they are more closely tailored to the requirements of the school.
- The headteacher has a comprehensive knowledge of the school and an accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses. During the inspection, senior leaders showed a perceptive insight into the quality of teaching. They have used their strong understanding of how children learn to shape the school's approach to teaching.
- Leaders have made effective use of advice and good practice from outside the school. They have ensured that teachers have the opportunity to learn from a range of sources. Staff told inspectors that training is helping them to improve their skills. Leaders have made sure that less-experienced teachers continued to have good access to advice and support after they had completed their first year.
- Leaders have set and maintained high expectations for pupils' attitudes and conduct. They check regularly on the quality of teaching. Leaders meet with teachers to discuss their assessments of pupils' work, and plan additional teaching to support pupils at risk of falling behind. They check on the effectiveness of this support in due course, and amend it if it is not having the desired impact.
- Middle leaders make a useful contribution to the management of the school. For example, subject leaders check on the quality of work in their subject and complete a formal evaluation. However, not all middle leaders are able to take a broad enough view of their area of responsibility to develop their own priorities and to plan for the future.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) benefit from very strong leadership. Leaders ensure that any additional needs are identified quickly, and ensure that staff have the necessary knowledge and training to meet them. They use a detailed analysis of these pupils' progress to make sure that teaching is having the desired impact. Staff work well with the parents of pupils with SEND.
- The pupil premium is spent well. The expenditure of a proportion of the grant on a programme to address some pupils' social and emotional barriers to learning has proved highly effective. The school ensures that each disadvantaged pupil has free access to those extra-curricular activities that most benefit them. Leaders analyse the impact of specific initiatives and track the progress of individual pupils, but there has been no overall evaluation of pupils' academic achievement against that of other pupils nationally.
- The headteacher has ensured that pupils benefit from an appropriately broad and engaging curriculum. Over time, pupils' learning pays due regard to all the foundation subjects and builds on the skills they have previously attained. However, arrangements for the teaching of music are currently under review, as pupils are not gaining the

range of skills in this subject that they should. Pupils enjoy taking part in a wide range of after-school clubs.

- The school uses the physical education (PE) and sport premium effectively. Training for lunchtime supervisors and new equipment have promoted active play at social times. Pupils also have the opportunity to take part in sports competitions with other schools.
- Leaders and governors are well aware of the diverse nature of the local community. They do not tolerate any discrimination, and have taken practical steps to ensure that everyone is treated fairly. They have made sure that the British values of tolerance and equality are central to the life of the school. This contributes to the wholehearted support that leaders enjoy from parents and other stakeholders.

Governance of the school

- Governors provide effective oversight of the school. They have ensured that, through the headteacher's report, they receive detailed and relevant information about the progress of the school. Minutes of their meetings show that they ask pertinent questions that hold leaders to account for the effectiveness of their actions. They are able to take a long-term, strategic view on the best course for the school to follow.
- There has been a considerable turnover of governors, since the last inspection. The governing body has appointed governors with specific skills that enhance its effectiveness, such as experience in business and finance. All governors have taken advantage of training, for example to better understand information about pupils' achievement and how governors should fulfil their 'Prevent' duty.
- Governors make sure that leaders keep pupils safe. They understand the local community and the specific risks associated with it, including those associated with radicalisation. They have worked well with leaders to uphold the school's commitment to inclusivity and fairness.
- Governors are aware of how additional funds to support particular groups of pupils are spent and the impact of expenditure on pupils' outcomes. However, their scrutiny of how leaders allocate the pupil premium grant would benefit from greater attention to detail.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. There is a strong culture of safeguarding at all levels.
- Leaders' thorough knowledge of the local community has enabled them to identify and address additional risks. They ensure that all staff are fully trained to spot pupils who may be at risk of harm, including risks associated with radicalisation and extremism. They provide staff with updates in response to any changes in legislation or in the local circumstances.
- Staff work effectively with parents, and other agencies that protect children, to safeguard those whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable. The school keeps well-ordered and detailed records of the concerns raised by staff and the support that they provide for individual pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching is consistently good, both in the early years and key stage 1. Pupils learn well because they are interested in the activities they are asked to complete, and the activities follow on well from what they already know and can do. Learning proceeds at a good pace.
- Teaching reflects leaders well-considered priorities for pupils' longer-term, academic development. Teachers continually introduce pupils to new vocabulary, and ensure that they understand the meaning of new words. They recognise the need to develop pupils' basic cultural knowledge so that pupils can fit later learning into a sound world view. For example, in Year 2 lesson on the ancient Egyptians the teacher checked that pupils understood both where Egypt is and when the pyramids were built.
- Staff question pupils effectively. They check the understanding of particular pupils in the class to ascertain whether the pace of the learning should be adapted. Questions also encourage pupils to extend their thinking and deepen their understanding. Teachers have good subject knowledge, and use the technical terms associated with each subject correctly.
- Teachers set work that is well matched to the abilities of pupils in the class or group. They plan skilfully to support the learning of the lower-ability pupils, and to challenge the most able. However, the most able pupils sometimes complete too much routine work or have to listen to extended explanation before they begin tasks that make them think hard.
- Leaders have improved the teaching of mathematics enormously. Teachers now give pupils ample opportunities to reason mathematically, so that pupils explain their thinking both in writing and orally. Pupils use mathematical equipment, such as blocks and number squares, to help them to develop more abstract understanding. Leaders have recognised that pupils' grasp of mathematical ideas can fade over time. As a response, teachers now test pupils' recall of a topic some time after they have finished it to check how well it is embedded in pupils' long-term memory.
- Pupils have good opportunities to develop their spoken language, both in answering questions in class and in talking with their peers. Staff encourage them to extend their contributions and correct discreetly any grammatical errors. As a result, pupils are increasingly able to make a considered spoken response, explaining a preference or how they would approach a problem.
- Staff teach phonics effectively. They take a consistent and systematic approach, and ensure that pupils build up their early reading and writing skills progressively. Staff ask pupils to use small whiteboards, so that they can identify and address any misconceptions. Leaders have ensured that pupils in key stage 1 also read texts together as a class. Teachers have identified the individual skills, such as inference, that pupils need to read successfully and use these as a focus for reading activities.
- Pupils have good opportunities to write, both imaginatively and factually. Work in foundation subjects increases the range of their writing, both in terms of style and purpose. Older pupils are encouraged to check on the accuracy of their own work and to make improvements. Pupils develop pre-cursive handwriting from an early age, so

that in Year 2 most handwriting is joined and appropriately tidy.

- Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning, both in the main classroom and when leading small groups. Leaders have ensured that they receive the necessary training to provide academic and pastoral support. However, on occasion teaching assistants do not respond as quickly or as precisely as they might do to challenge misconceptions or refocus pupils' attention.
- Leaders have overhauled the school's assessment procedures. By comparing teachers' assessments with those made in other schools and with standardised tests, they have ensured that judgements about pupils' attainment at all levels are accurate. Leaders keep detailed records of attainment in English, mathematics, science, history, geography and PE. The information is increasingly well used to plan future learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Leaders pay good attention to pupils' physical health and development. They encourage pupils to engage in active play, to walk to school and to take part in extra-curricular sport. In science, pupils learn about the importance of healthy eating.
- Staff work intensively with those pupils who experience emotional or social barriers to learning, so that they come to approach their work with enthusiasm and resilience. Some lower-ability pupils told the inspectors that they 'do well in maths because we try and try and never give up'.
- Pupils have very good attitudes to learning. They demonstrate enthusiasm for their studies, and, for their age, pupils have a good understanding of how they learn. They take a pride in their work, and present it neatly.
- Pupils feel safe in school. They told inspectors that unpleasant behaviour is rare, and that they would report it to an adult. Pupils learn about several aspects of safety, such as how to stay safe on the roads. Staff demonstrate a high standard of care for those pupils whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable. In appropriate cases, the support extends to the family as a whole.
- Pupils learn in their religious education lessons about several faiths and traditions. In their assemblies and through personal, social, health and economic education, staff emphasise that there are no outsiders. Everyone is welcome and everyone is equal. As a result, pupils develop a genuine tolerance of those who are different from themselves.
- Through the school council, pupils learn how they can influence decisions about their school. Members are chosen by formal election, and so pupils learn about the democratic process. Pupils also organise raising money for charity, to demonstrate their care for others.
- A very few pupils attend alternative provision full time in order to help them to address behavioural issues that are preventing them from learning. Staff keep a careful eye on their welfare. They make good progress in overcoming their difficulties such that

leaders expect them to start attending their normal school shortly.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. The school is a very orderly environment. Leaders set high standards for behaviour, which staff uphold consistently. Staff work successfully with those few pupils whose lack of self-confidence or resilience bars them from enjoying their work.
- Pupils behave consistently well in lessons. Teachers establish effective routines during pupils' earliest weeks in the school, and reinforce these by praising and rewarding good behaviour. Pupils move about the classroom and tidy up with little fuss, so that no time is wasted. They listen attentively to the teacher and to each other. Pupils learn to take turns and cooperate when asked to do so.
- Pupils' conduct outside lessons is orderly and responsible. They play happily together, making good use of a wide range of playground equipment. Inspectors saw no instances of aggression or antisocial behaviour. Pupils are polite and respectful to adults.
- The school has made use of fixed-term exclusion to address the most serious behavioural incidents, but the number of exclusions has declined steeply in recent years. There has been one permanent exclusion this academic year.
- In the academic year 2017/18, pupils' attendance was low, and the proportion of pupils who were absent persistently was high. Leaders increased the rewards for good attendance, and acted as personal mentors for the persistent absentees. As a result, the rate of persistent absence has halved this academic year. The overall rate of attendance has risen, although it remains below the national average.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Outcomes for pupils are good because, across the school, pupils make strong progress. They make good gains in the knowledge and skills associated with English, mathematics and foundation subjects. The scrutiny of pupils' work shows that current pupils across the school are making strong progress in English and mathematics. In each subject, pupils complete a good range of work and teachers check regularly on the skills and knowledge that pupils have gained.
- In 2017 and 2018, the proportion of pupils who met the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1 was at or above the national average. Pupils currently in Year 2 are on track to perform similarly.
- The school has established a strong reading culture. Pupils have good access to printed books and books online, designed to match their developing reading skills. Many older pupils also read younger children's fiction. The large majority of pupils are enthusiastic readers. Leaders have helped parents to recognise how they can best support their children, and almost all pupils read regularly at home. As a result of good phonics teaching and the school's support for reading, the proportion of Year 1 pupils who meet the expected standard in the phonics screening check has been at least in line with the national average.

- Leaders check carefully on the progress of those groups of pupils who are at risk of underachievement, including disadvantaged pupils and boys. Although some gaps remain, the attainment of these groups is now more in line with that of their peers in the school. Inspection evidence shows that disadvantaged pupils take the same care with their work as other pupils. Over time, they make good progress, reflecting the effective expenditure of the pupil premium.
- Pupils with SEND make strong progress. Those pupils with social and emotional needs follow a planned programme that rapidly develops their self-confidence and sense of responsibility. Leaders start with the assumption that pupils with SEND will make at least the same academic progress as other pupils in the school, and, in general, this expectation is met.
- The broad curriculum and the assessment of pupils' attainment in foundation subjects help to ensure that pupils gain new knowledge and skills in subjects such as geography, history and science. In science, pupils learn how to approach an experiment and how to record results.
- Pupils' enthusiasm for their learning, the range of subjects, and, for the majority of pupils, the attainment of the expected standard in the end-of-key-stage tests, mean that they are well prepared for the move to junior school. Leaders recognise that a more detailed consideration of the curriculums for the infant school and the partner junior school would enable pupils' academic transition to be even smoother.

Early years provision

Good

- Most children enter the Reception Year with skills that are below, or well below, those typical for their age. The majority of children have previously attended the school's Nursery provision. Those children who join Reception from other settings, or none, are commonly behind their peers.
- Inspection evidence shows that children make good progress during their time in the early years. In the Reception class, they develop their phonic skills effectively, learning to read both regular and tricky words with confidence. Children learn to write in a clear, cursive handwriting and to construct simple sentences. Their workbooks show that they also make good progress in the early learning of mathematics. Many pupils with low starting points catch up rapidly. However, in the last couple of years, the proportion of children attaining a good level of development has been somewhat below the national average.
- Staff place a heavy emphasis on introducing children to new vocabulary, and ensuring that they use it accurately. Children who speak English as an additional language are introduced to new words relating to a topic before they study it in class. As a result, they are able to gain a good grasp of the new ideas.
- Teaching in the early years is good. Teachers plan topics that readily engage children's interest. Staff link new ideas to what children already know. They question them well to encourage them to develop their thinking and explain themselves at greater length. Teachers provide children with attractive resources, so during the inspection children were attempting a wide range of different activities. Leaders make sure that all areas of learning are covered. Occasionally, staff might provide the most able children with

activities that constitute a sharper challenge.

- Children behave consistently well. Leaders establish clear routines from the outset. Children move between activities with no fuss, and treat each other with respect. They take turns and share resources well. Staff pay close attention to all aspects of children's well-being, and all welfare requirements are met.
- The early years setting is led well. Leaders are alive to the strengths and weaknesses of the early years, and take action to improve its effectiveness. For example, they have increased boys' willingness to focus on their work by providing more physical activities in the outdoor area. Leaders have responded to many children's low level of personal, social and emotional development when they join the setting by taking specific measures to build their confidence.
- Leaders have checked teachers' judgements about children's attainment with those made by teachers in other settings. Assessment, including the baseline of children's skills on entry, is accurate. Leaders use assessment to identify any gaps in children's learning and then provide additional teaching to close them.
- The early years staff constitute an effective team. Good communication ensures that all staff are alive to individual pupils' needs. Leaders have provided effective training, especially for staff working in the Nursery class and to enable teaching assistants to meet some pupils' additional needs. Leaders have drawn on good practice from outside the school.
- Both indoor and outdoor learning environments are attractive and well maintained. Displays effectively reinforce children's early understanding of literacy and numeracy.

School details

Unique reference number	103169
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10088464

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

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	225
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Colin Turner
Headteacher	Anna Stevenson
Telephone number	0121 4644310
Website	www.birchgni.bham.sch.uk
Email address	enquiry@birchgni.bham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	13–14 December 2016

Information about this school

- Birches Green Infant School is a little smaller than the average-sized primary school. Children attend full time in the Reception class, but most in the Nursery class attend only part time.
- The school shares a site with Birches Green Junior School, to which most Year 2 pupils transfer. There is no official link between the two schools.
- A before- and after-school club operates on the school site. It is not managed by the governors and is inspected separately.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is above average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is above average.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above average and rising.
- A very few pupils currently attend the Ashbourne Centre within the City of Birmingham

School full time. The alternative provision is to help to address their emotional and behavioural needs.

Information about this inspection

- Year 2 pupils were absent from school on the second day of the inspection. They were visiting the junior schools that they are due to attend in September.
- Inspectors observed learning in all year groups. Some of the observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders. The inspectors also observed pupils' conduct at social times.
- The inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, other leaders, staff, members of the governing body, a school improvement adviser and a representative of the local authority.
- Many pupils talked informally with the inspectors during the inspection. An inspector listened to pupils in Year 1 read, and looked at their reading records.
- The inspectors scrutinised, in depth, work produced by a number of pupils in the Reception Year and Year 2. The inspectors considered printed and electronic information about current pupils' performance.
- The inspectors looked at a wide range of documents. These included: development plans and evaluations of the school's progress; records of how leaders check on teaching; details of pupils' attendance and behaviour; records of visits made by consultants supporting the school; the headteacher's reports to the governing body; minutes of governing body meetings; policies; and records showing how the school supports vulnerable pupils.
- Inspectors took into account the 30 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 38 comments made using the free-text facility. One inspector spoke to several parents bringing their children to school on the second day of the inspection. Inspectors also considered the 21 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

Martin Spoor, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
John Bates	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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