

# Birchwood Avenue Primary School

## Inspection report

---

<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	132105
<b>Local Authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	341288
<b>Inspection dates</b>	30 June –1 July 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Paul Canham

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

---

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	179
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Kate Wright
<b>Teacher in charge</b>	Martin Tuck
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	23 January 2007
<b>School address</b>	Birchwood Avenue Hatfield Hertfordshire
<b>Telephone number</b>	01707 262503
<b>Fax number</b>	01707 258500
<b>Email address</b>	admin@birchwoodavenue.herts.sch.uk

---

<b>Age group</b>	4–11
<b>Inspection dates</b>	30 June –1 July 2010
<b>Inspection number</b>	341288

---

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 08456 404045, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the documentation in any way.

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

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)

W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

© Crown copyright 2010

## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 13 lessons, observed seven teachers, and held meetings with governors, staff and a group of pupils, and talked with pupils in lessons. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, including assessment and attendance information, lesson plans, safeguarding arrangements, school development planning, governing body minutes and pupils' work. Inspectors also scrutinised the 32 questionnaires received from parents and carers, as well as those from staff and a sample of pupils.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- how successfully the interim leadership team and staff are laying down secure foundations from which the school can move forward and sustain improvement
- how effectively newly established procedures and higher expectations of academic performance are helping to tackle variations in learning and levels of underachievement
- how effectively the governing body is influencing the school's direction and holding it to account for standards.

## Information about the school

This is a smaller than average sized primary school. The majority of pupils are from families of White British heritage. The largest minority ethnic group is from a range of other White backgrounds. The percentage of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well above that found in most other schools. An increasing proportion of pupils are at the early stages of learning to speak English. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is above average and in some year groups is as high as 28%. The proportion of pupils who arrive at or leave the school at other than the expected times is well above that found in most other schools.

The school is currently led by an interim executive headteacher who joined the school in January 2010. He shares his leadership role with another school nearby. There have been substantial changes to staffing, including the senior leadership team, since the last inspection.

Pupils in Year 4 were at a residential camp during the period of this inspection.

There is a children's centre adjacent to the school but this is not managed by the school's governors. It was not included in this inspection.

**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?**

**3**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**3**

## Main findings

The school provides a satisfactory education. It has several good features, which include a supportive learning environment that places a high priority on enhancing pupils' self-esteem and in developing their confidence. Consequently, pupils have good attitudes to school and work well together and independently. They have a good awareness of how to keep safe and live a healthy lifestyle. Parents and carers are supportive of the school.

Decisive leadership is the key factor in the school's drive for improvement and addressing the decline in standards. The interim executive headteacher, with close support from committed staff, has moved the school to a firm position from which it can move forward. Staff have been encouraged to develop their roles and play a full part in accelerating the pace of change. One of the outcomes is reflected in the attitudes of staff, who say that they are well supported and that they now have greater confidence in their ability. Senior leaders are eager to play a key role in ensuring the school's sustained improvement but recognise the need to strengthen their leadership skills through training and professional development. Tracking systems are well embedded. The influence of the more rigorous approach and higher expectations is reflected in several aspects, including much improved attendance.

The school has a clear understanding of where it is now and of the improvements needed. Governors are aware of the need to develop their role and hold the school to account for tackling weaknesses and improving standards. Senior leaders' awareness and vision are well informed by an accurate self-evaluation and, as a consequence, the school is soundly placed to move forward.

The school's drive for high quality teaching is evident in the systematic monitoring used to bring about change in practice. Consequently, teachers usually plan interesting activities that capture the pupils' interests. However, some activities lack sufficient challenge, particularly for the more able. Teaching is not yet good enough to ensure that all pupils make consistently good progress through the school. Nevertheless, the decline in attainment has been reversed and pupils are on course to reach levels that are close to national averages. Achievement is satisfactory. Intervention work, including well-tailored support for individual pupils, is successfully making up for lost ground in learning for all groups of pupils.

Clubs and sporting activities are popular and provide pupils with good opportunities to develop confidence, and their creative and performance skills. While the school has good links with outside agencies, local schools and the community, it recognises the need to provide pupils with more opportunities to appreciate and value people's

**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

backgrounds and communities in other parts of this country and globally.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop the leadership and management skills of the new leadership team.
  - Raise levels of achievement, particularly for the more able, by ensuring that teaching includes challenging tasks pitched at the right level.
  - Strengthen the role of the governing body by ensuring that members monitor and evaluate the work of the school more closely.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

**3**

There are clear signs that the school's determined efforts and closely-targeted support are making a substantial difference, resulting in pupils making better progress than they did before. Pupils' willingness to become involved in learning, as seen during the inspection in their enthusiastic responses during English, mathematics and music lessons, is typical and indicates the satisfactory and sometimes good pace of learning across the school. Pupils work well in small groups and independently of the teacher, and they show determination in getting the tasks right. There are no significant variations in the levels of progress of different groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, those who speak English as an additional language, and those who join the school partway through their education.

Children start school in Reception with a narrow range of skills and lower than expected levels of knowledge and understanding in several key aspects, especially in communication. In 2009, pupils' attainment dropped sharply for the second consecutive year to below average as indicated by the results of national tests and assessments for pupils in Years 2 and 6. This decline in attainment has now been arrested. Pupils currently in Years 2 and 6 are on course to reach average levels because teaching is stronger in these years and support is well focused. Significant proportions of pupils are on track to gain levels above those expected of pupils with the same age. More-able pupils also make satisfactory progress, despite lesson activities not always fully challenging them. The school is on course to reach or exceed its challenging targets, particularly for those pupils reaching the higher levels.

Pupils say they like coming to school, enjoy making friends and feel secure in the supportive environment. These positive attitudes are reflected in much improved attendance. Pupils also show enjoyment of practical activities, such as playing musical instruments and participating in sporting activities. Pupils are considerate towards each other, polite and courteous, and willingly take on responsibilities to help the school run smoothly. The school council provides good opportunities for pupils to represent the views of others and help to make decisions regarding the running of the school.

**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

Supported by the school's projects to encourage enterprise, such as participating in a 'Dragons Den' project, pupils' personal skills are developing into important qualities for when they leave school. Pupils' good levels of understanding of living healthily are evident in the way they talk about the importance of eating different kinds of food and of the importance of exercise.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	3
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

### How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching varies, but effective classroom management, good relationships and questioning that probes pupils' understanding are key strengths. However, activities do not always expect enough from pupils, particularly the more-able. Pupils who learn quickly are not always given sufficiently challenging activities early enough in lessons. Topics, such as those that encourage pupils to write creatively and for different purposes, successfully capture pupils' interest and hold their attention. Consequently, pupils are enthusiastic and willingly become involved in their learning. Assessment procedures have been considerably strengthened but are not always used consistently to guide lesson planning. Marking is supportive and targets help pupils to understand

---

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

**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

what they need to do to improve.

The curriculum provides a considered balance between basic skills in literacy and numeracy and the development of pupils' performance and creative skills in subjects such as physical education and music. Pupils are given opportunities to reinforce their learning and to develop skills through topics that link different subjects. The curriculum is under continual review and some strategies have yet to have a full impact. The school knows it must do more to improve pupils' writing, especially for boys, although there are clear signs that paying greater attention to the links between letters and sounds is already paying off. The curriculum is supported by a well planned programme for personal, social and health education. Pupils' learning experiences are further enriched by a number of popular clubs, residential trips, visits to places of interest, and the use of subject specialists.

The good support for pupils' personal development and pastoral care is recognised and valued by parents and carers. One parent's comment illustrated a particular strength: 'It is a very safe and happy school'. Attention to pupils' health and well-being is reflected not just in opportunities for physical activity, but also in the provision of healthy school meals. Individualised programmes of support are made for pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable to underachievement, covering a broad range of personal and learning needs. Individual achievement is now effectively managed through comprehensive tracking of attainment and progress. Evaluations lead to timely and well focused intervention, which is starting to reinforce pupils' literacy skills and build confidence.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>

**How effective are leadership and management?**

Resourceful and focused leadership has moved the school from a fragile position to one which places it on a firm foundation from which it can move forward. With close support from the local authority and school staff, the new leadership team is establishing a school that is resolved to lifting levels of achievement and raising attainment. Members of the leadership team are eager to take the school forward but the school has not had sufficient time to develop their skills. The significant improvements already made to pupils' academic performance illustrate the concerted action taken by staff to promote equality of opportunity. The school addresses any form of discrimination well. Robust systems have been introduced and challenging targets are set to further improve

**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

achievement. Staff and governors have a clear and accurate view of the areas for improvement and school development planning is very well focused on key priorities. Attention to pupils' safety is integral to the school's work and safeguarding procedures are firmly established. Detailed and well organised procedures ensure that safeguarding arrangements are carefully followed. The school uses well embedded and reliable quality assurance and risk assessment systems. Local services and agencies are used well to enhance the well-being of pupils experiencing difficult circumstances and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, governors fully understand the need, with the help of additional training, to develop their skills and get more involved in monitoring the school's work in a systematic way.

Community cohesion is strongly promoted within the school and in the community. Close links and partnerships with schools nearby and outside agencies show a secure understanding of local needs and challenges. However, the school knows that it must do more to help pupils understand people's backgrounds and communities in other parts of the United Kingdom and beyond. Parents and carers are supportive of the school and readily play an active part in events such as the school fete and curriculum evenings. They benefit from regular newsletters and access to the school's recently launched website which is being developed.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>3</b>

**Early Years Foundation Stage**

The provision is overseen by the deputy headteacher who has introduced thorough assessment procedures that give accurate and reliable information about children's



**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

progress. This information is used to pitch planning at the right level. From starting points below those expected for their age, children make satisfactory, and sometimes good, progress in all areas of learning. Particularly good gains are made in physical and personal development. However, overall progress is too variable to be any greater than satisfactory.

Imaginative and sensitive teaching captures the children's interests. Well-planned topics ensure all areas of learning are covered, with a particular focus on early reading, writing and number skills. However, on occasion, some of the vocabulary used by adults is too challenging. Support is good for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and for the significant proportion of children who speak English as additional language.

The school makes effective use of the indoor and outside areas which provide a wide range of stimulating activities. Adults give closely-targeted support to activities directed by the teacher as well as those which children choose for themselves. Children are nurtured from the very start. As a result, they settle quickly and are eager to learn. Relationships are strengths. Children listen attentively and chatter happily about their work.

*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

**Views of parents and carers**

A very small minority of parents and carers returned the questionnaires. However, the very large majority of responses were positive. Some of the few written comments expressed considerable satisfaction with the school. These included positive remarks about the caring and supportive environment and the quality of the staff.

A very small minority of parents and carers recorded reservations over a very small number of issues, including the way the school deals with unacceptable behaviour and the departure of the previous headteacher. The inspection found evidence to indicate that the school deals with any unacceptable behaviour in a very effective way that pupils understand and value. The executive headteacher and deputy headteacher are seeking to meet with parents and carers who have expressed concern about issues related to staffing.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Birchwood Avenue Primary 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 32 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 179 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	14	44	15	47	1	3	2	6
The school keeps my child safe	20	63	9	28	3	9	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	16	50	12	38	3	9	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	12	38	15	47	4	13	1	3
The teaching is good at this school	14	44	15	47	2	6	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	13	41	15	47	4	13	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	15	47	12	38	4	13	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)	12	38	15	47	0	0	2	6
The school meets my child's particular needs	11	34	17	53	1	3	2	6
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	9	28	14	44	3	9	6	19
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	11	34	14	44	4	13	3	9
The school is led and managed effectively	12	38	12	38	4	13	1	3
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	17	53	12	38	2	6	1	3

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 pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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 pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

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 is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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 pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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 pupils 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"> <li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li> <li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li> <li>■ The quality of teaching.</li> <li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li> <li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li> </ul>
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

**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.**



2 July 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Birchwood Avenue Primary School, Hatfield, AL10 0PS

We very much enjoyed our visit to your school and thank you for making us feel so welcome. This letter is to tell you about some of the things we found while we were with you. Your school has gone through a number of changes in staffing, including the headteacher. However, it is a place where you want to be, make lots of friends, and enjoy taking part in the interesting activities. You behave well and get on well with each other.

Here are some important things about your school:

- you make satisfactory, and sometimes good, progress in lessons
- you respond well to interesting activities
- you feel safe and secure in school and enjoy your work
- those in charge of the school are making improvements that are helping you to make faster progress
- all staff take good care of you, and make sure that you know what to do to keep safe
- you have a good understanding of what makes for a healthy lifestyle and healthy eating.

To make things even better for you, your school has been asked to:

- develop the leadership and management skills of those teachers who run the school
- help you to make faster progress, especially those of you who learn quickly, by giving you more challenging activities
- ensure that those in charge of the school keep a closer eye on how well it is doing.

We wish each one of you every success in your future education and hope that you continue to enjoy learning as much as you do now. You can all help the school by continuing to work hard.

Yours sincerely

Paul Canham

Lead inspector

**Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 08456 404045, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).**