

Lincoln Birchwood Junior School

Larchwood Crescent, Lincoln LN6 ONL

Inspection dates 24–25 February 2016

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
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Achievement is rising across the school, because pupils now make good progress in almost all subjects and year groups.
- The most-able pupils are consistently challenged and high proportions now exceed the standards expected for their age nationally.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is now good. The schools' daily spellings, grammar and number practice, have raised pupils' key skills.
- School leaders provide good support for teachers and use performance management systems effectively to develop the skills of all staff. This has raised the quality of teaching and, as a result, pupils' achievement.
- Strengthened partnership work with the main feeder infant school provides good transition for pupils coming into Year 3.
- Additional government funding for disadvantaged pupils is used effectively. The gaps between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and their classmates are closing rapidly in all subjects.
- Pupils are positive, keen learners; they enjoy coming to school and attendance is high for all groups.
- Pupils' personal development and welfare are outstanding. The excellent care and support helps the most vulnerable pupils and those with additional needs to settle and make good progress.
- Governors make frequent, focused visits and check how well pupils are learning. They monitor all aspects of safeguarding carefully and speak with pupils about feeling safe. Governors act on pupils' comments to make improvements.
- Safeguarding is effective and remains a high priority within the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- In lessons, pupils are frequently not given enough time to practise and develop new skills before they are moved on to other tasks.
- Occasionally, follow-on activities do not link with core learning and pupils have limited opportunities to deepen their understanding.
- Subject leaders' checks on teaching and the quality of pupils' work are not consistent, compared with pupils' progress.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that subject leaders link their checks on teaching and work in books with pupils' progress and use this to direct any additional activities or support.
- Raise achievement further by ensuring that all teachers:
 - give pupils enough time in class to build on and deepen what they have learned before allowing them to move on to other work.
 - plan activities which follow on from core learning and enable pupils to apply new knowledge and skills securely in other subjects and areas.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- School leaders and governors communicate a clear and determined vision to improve the school. They have successfully focused attention on raising the quality of teaching which is now typically good across the school. Staff receive good support and their skills are developed through secure performance management systems.
- The headteacher works effectively across the junior and main feeder infant school. This has enabled staff to share information on pupils' assessments and work together to moderate and align their judgements more accurately. Transition into the juniors runs smoothly because staff have detailed information about what pupils can do and quickly put support in place so that pupils get off to a good start.
- Staff morale is high and those responding to questionnaires and informally commenting during the inspection have expressed their unanimous support for the improvements made since the last inspection. Senior leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for improvement, and have prioritised raising the capacity of middle leaders. Middle leaders' training has enhanced their skills to monitor and check pupils' work in their areas. However, there are inconsistencies in how links are made with pupils' progress, and missed opportunities to drive up achievement further.
- The school is a warm and friendly community where all pupils get along and are fully accepted and included. Pupils are treated equally and feel valued and respected. They in turn show their respect and regard for each other and there is no discrimination. Pupils understand how British values relate to everyday life, and assembly themes such as democracy provide a good opportunity to discuss the next general election and what it means to have a vote. Pupils show their values through their actions and attitudes towards each other. They have good knowledge and awareness of the beliefs and cultures of others living in Britain today.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well and is committed to offering pupils a wide variety of cultural and creative experiences through trips, visits and activities in school. The school is particularly proud of its success in using film to enhance writing, and has won five prestigious film awards.
- The curriculum provides good opportunities to learn, develop and use skills across different subjects. Topics chosen attract pupils' interest. High levels of interest and engagement have contributed to good progress in all subjects.
- Funding for disadvantaged pupils is used effectively to improve their academic achievements and boost their personal and learning skills. Pupils have full access to all trips and visits and gaps in attainment are quickly closing across the years. These pupils make good progress, in line with others in the school.
- The additional funding for primary sport and physical education is used very effectively. Pupils actively participate in a wide range of sports and additional resources have deliberately been purchased to develop pupils' coordination and fine motor skills for writing. Sports ambassadors champion healthy lifestyles and even referee football matches.
- Parents are fully supportive of the school and those responding to questionnaires and speaking with inspectors are highly praising of how the school has improved. They attend workshops and frequently come into school to read with their children.
- The local authority provides good support and has facilitated partnerships with a group of schools locally and a Lincoln teaching school. This forward-thinking approach strengthens available support for the school in the near future, when the local authority will cease to have a team of advisers. The partnerships with other schools have been beneficial in moderating pupils' work and sharing good practice among the staff.
- The school is in a strong position to continue to improve further.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors have improved and sharpened their work with the school since the last inspection. Following an external review of their practices, governors have a deeper understanding of assessment information. This helps them to ask more specific and challenging questions about pupils' achievements.
 - Link governors make frequent visits to the school to look at pupils' work in books and see how the quality of teaching helps them to learn. Governors are highly visible at school events and there is a governor present at every parents' evening to listen to their views.

- Governors review the school development plan and understand the strengths and areas where the school could improve further. They look closely at how performance management is used to develop and support all staff, and this has helped to raise the quality of teaching to the good level now seen across the school. They are fully supportive of the improved partnership with the infant school and encouraged the creation of the executive headteacher position.
- Additional funds to boost the uptake of sport across the school are closely monitored and governors see how the work of specialist coaches has raised pupils’ participation levels in a range of different activities.
- Governors look closely at information on how pupil premium funds are spent and sensitively monitor the appointment of a sports specialist mentor who runs the breakfast and after-school clubs with the impact on pupils’ self-esteem. Governors monitor the cost of extra resources and strategies used, and align this with the successful closure of in-school learning gaps for these pupils.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. School leaders have excellent partnerships with parents, carers and external agencies. They rigorously follow local and national guidelines to ensure that all pupils are supported and feel safe. Governors’ health and safety visits make thorough checks of safeguarding practices and training is sharply up to date. Governors understand the importance of keeping pupils safe and make a point of asking for their views. They requested that school leaders hold a parents’ e-safety workshop following pupils’ concerns, and recognise their role in maintaining a high level of focus on this area. Governors know precisely what to do in the event of a safeguarding concern.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment **is good**

- The quality of teaching is now typically good in the majority of classes in the school. This leads to good rates of progress in reading, writing and mathematics, spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- Teachers and teaching assistants form a close partnership to ensure that the quality of planned lessons and pupils’ learning is good. They express their high expectations and this has contributed to pupils’ positive attitudes and determination to do well. Adults’ use of questioning and modelling examples helps pupils to learn effectively and understand new concepts. Occasionally, follow-on activities are not linked to the core learning and pupils have limited opportunities to deepen what they know and can do.
- Skilled teaching assistants provide good support for pupils with additional needs both inside and outside the classroom; they know their pupils well and receive good direction from class teachers. The impact of their work is closely checked by the special educational needs coordinator and enables pupils with additional learning needs and those who are disadvantaged to learn well and make good progress. Teachers know who the most-able pupils are in every class and increasingly provide tasks which stretch and challenge them further. In a Year 6 top mathematics set, pupils immerse themselves in testing a mathematical hypothesis and use algebra to find the best map location for a circular nature reserve. They are given the time to apply what they have learned and, as a result, deepen their understanding. This is not consistent across years and classes, and often pupils are moved on too quickly before their knowledge is secure.
- Teachers encourage pupils to read both in and out of school, and invite parents to join them in class for reading and cakes and to listen to story time. Pupils enjoy reading and respond positively to reading rewards such as a visit to a local bookshop by a group of the most-able pupil premium readers. Pupils have good opportunities to read in lessons and practise spellings and grammar daily. As a result, pupils make good progress and standards in reading are rising.
- Pupils and parents comment positively on how homework and the use of web-based activities provide good variety and help them to enhance their learning. Year 6 pupils use mathematics revision guides effectively to extend their understanding through homework activities. Parents value the information which the school provides on their children’s progress and look closely at how they can improve and what they, as parents, can do to help.
- Pupils are developing a good understanding of how to improve their work because adults provide helpful verbal feedback and follow the school’s policy when marking books. Pupils act on advice and guidance given and this helps them to improve.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils say that they feel very safe in school and know about being safe on the internet from their e-safety discussions. 'Bikeability' gives them heightened road safety skills and pupils speak with governors about other health and safety aspects.
- The school treats any form of bullying very seriously and carefully records the few incidents which occur. Information and communication technology lessons include information about cyber bullying, and parents' workshops help to retain a high level of awareness of safeguarding in the school.
- Pupils' emotional health and well-being is at the heart of the school's work and pupils know that there are several staff whom they can talk to if they have any worries or concerns. Mentors and counsellors in school provide excellent one-to-one support for those in need at any time, and the parent support worker is an essential link for vulnerable families. Because of this, pupils settle easily and learn and achieve well.
- Pupils willingly take on additional responsibilities and are elected to join the school council or become sports ambassadors. They frequently seek the views of others and organise playtime activities to promote healthy lifestyles.
- All pupils in the school have a voice and their opinions are regularly sought through focused, whole-school chatter group discussions. Pupils consider topics which affect their school lives, such as e-safety, lunchtime arrangements and spelling boosters. Their views are welcomed by school leaders and this makes pupils feel highly valued.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils in all areas of the school are polite and courteous; they mirror the caring ethos of the school and treat each other and staff with courtesy and consideration. Pupils listen to others' points of view before offering their own, and enjoy taking part in group discussions about their school.
- Pupils behave well in class and around the school and there is little off-task behaviour. On the few occasions where pupils lose focus and behaviour wanes, adults' effective use of behaviour sanctions and 'friendly warnings' quickly restore the balance. School records show that behaviour is typically good.
- Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and enjoy coming to school. Attendance remains high for all groups of pupils, and the popular breakfast club and class rewards are good incentives for encouraging pupils to come to school on time and ready to learn.
- Staff and parents who responded to the questionnaires all unanimously agreed that behaviour in the school is good.

Outcomes for pupils are good

- Pupils now make good progress throughout the school and achieve well in almost all subjects and years. Results of national tests in the past show that for previous Year 6 pupils there were slight increases in the proportions reaching the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics and a slight dip in the spelling, punctuation and grammar test.
- Attainment is now rising more rapidly and pupils currently in Year 6 are on track to meet and exceed the standards expected for their age by the end of the year. This means that they will outperform previous Year 6 pupils in all subjects. School information indicates that more pupils now work at higher levels and the most-able pupils are performing more successfully than in previous years. High proportions of the most-able pupils are now working at 'exceeding levels', compared with others in their age group.
- The whole school drive to enhance literacy skills through the daily spelling, punctuation and grammar work, and to securely master mathematics number attainment, has contributed to their improved results.
- Pupils who have special educational needs or disability make good progress in line with their peers in school. They receive skilfully tailored help and support and are fully included in all activities.

- In previous years, the progress of disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 was variable when compared with their peers. Their best successes were in mathematics where higher proportions of pupils made expected progress, and in both reading and writing where they outperformed their classmates at higher progress levels. Their attainment improved in 2015 and compared with the previous year, in-school gaps in writing and spelling, punctuation and grammar closed most notably. Pupil premium funding is closely monitored, and leaders and governors measure the impact on pupils' achievements during the year. Small ability sets in Year 6 have contributed to improved outcomes and particularly raised the achievement of the most-able pupils who had previously failed to match the progress levels of their peers nationally.
- Year 3 pupils joining the school who have been unsuccessful in the national phonics screening check receive swift, effective intervention. They make good progress early on and soon catch up with their classmates' reading skills.
- Standards are rising across the school and the most-able pupils now exceed the expected levels of attainment for their age in all subjects. Adults have raised their expectations of what pupils are capable of and pupils now have higher aspirations for themselves. Teachers and leaders make sure that work set is harder and stretches pupils to think at a higher level. This equips Year 6 pupils well for their secondary school places.

School details

Unique reference number	120508
Local authority	Lincolnshire
Inspection number	10009107

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	267
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brian Main
Headteacher	Tracey Bowman
Telephone number	01522 800971
Website	www.birchwood.lincs.sch.uk
Email address	enquiries@birchwood.lincs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	27 March 2014

Information about this school

- The school is an above-sized junior school and the number of pupils has increased slightly since the last inspection.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage and speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and, therefore, supported through the pupil premium is well above average. The pupil premium is additional government funding to support pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are in the care of the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is well above the national average.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has become part of a collaborative partnership with eight other schools and has formed a partnership with a local teaching school alliance.
- The headteacher is currently the executive headteacher of one of the feeder infant schools and divides her time equally between the two schools.
- Governors are responsible for running the school's breakfast and after-school clubs.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 22 lessons, seven jointly with the headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- They observed support in and out of class for pupils who need additional help with their learning, listened to readers and attended a whole-school assembly.
- The inspection team looked closely at pupils' work in every class and spoke with pupils about their learning.
- Inspectors spoke informally with parents at the start of each day and took note of their views through the 20 responses to Ofsted' online questionnaire, Parent View.
- Inspectors spoke informally to pupils around the school and met with two different groups, school councillors and sports ambassadors, and a group with additional needs, for a discussion about their experiences of life in the school.
- Staff returned 21 questionnaires during the inspection and these were analysed to gain their views of the school.
- Inspectors met with two governors, had a discussion with a school adviser and held discussions with school leaders responsible for checking English, mathematics, assessments and for coordinating special educational needs.
- Inspectors checked school documentation on attendance and behaviour and looked closely at pupils' current progress and the monitoring of safeguarding. They looked at records of governors' meetings and how the school manages staff performance.

Inspection team

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