Inspection of Much Birch CofE Primary School

Much Birch, Hereford, Herefordshire HR2 8HL

Inspection dates: 30 April and 1 May 2024

Overall effectiveness	**Good**
The quality of education	**Good**
Behaviour and attitudes	**Good**
Personal development	**Good**
Leadership and management	**Good**
Early years provision	**Good**
Previous inspection grade	Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Much Birch is a kind and caring school where parents, pupils and staff celebrate feeling part of a family. Pupils feel safe because of the warm relationships they develop with staff who help them when they find things difficult.

Pupils welcome visitors to their school, wearing smiles on their faces and an openness to share the many positive experiences they have. They recognise the importance of being inclusive and know that their school is a nice place to belong because everybody is accepted and noticed.

There are many wider opportunities that pupils get to develop their talents and interests. Many enjoy learning craft in the forest school, while others speak effusively about being pupil leaders by representing the school council or acting as buddies to those in younger classes.

A focus on the development of pupils' character has supported them to understand the meaning of the term 'moral compass'. Many pupils seek to do the right things for the right reasons, showing perseverance and humility while doing so.

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

Leaders at this school demonstrate a determination to do their best for the community they serve. They welcome challenge and new ways of doing things. The school seeks the support of advisers who help develop the quality of education on offer. By placing as much emphasis on pupils doing well academically as they do their wider development, leaders believe they develop happy and motivated pupils who enjoy learning. Pupils agree.

Children in the early stages of their education get off to a good start. The curriculum is well matched to children's interests and needs. Children learn to enjoy stories and rhymes and many are reading with greater accuracy. They show a readiness for their learning and an increasing ability to regulate their emotions. Many play well together and have strong relationships with key adults.

Pupils demonstrate a wider love of reading. A growing choice of books from different time periods and authors positively influences pupils' reading choices. Those at the early stages of reading are well supported by the school's approach to the teaching of phonics. The most vulnerable readers receive the precise support they require to read accurately and fluently.

The school has successfully trained staff in how to adapt lessons to support all pupils to access the intended learning. In some subjects, training in how to use assessment effectively is successfully enabling staff to challenge misconceptions and deepen pupils' learning. However, support staff lack the necessary subject-specific knowledge in some subjects.

The wider curriculum is developing, with some subjects having coherently planned learning sequences that build successfully on what pupils know. However, in a few subjects, this is not the case. Monitoring in these subjects has not identified that activities are often prioritised over the development of the important skills and knowledge the school wants pupils to acquire.

An identified area of improvement is mathematics. Pupils learn the basic number facts and many are confident when rehearsing written calculation methods. However, a lack of opportunities to develop verbal and written reasoning prevents pupils deepening their understanding of some mathematical concepts.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are increasingly well supported and their needs accurately identified. The school is further developing its systems to assess and review learning plans, but successfully engages parents in this process. Those agencies working with the school do so effectively to remove barriers that may affect a pupil's ability to learn. Pupils with SEND are making good progress from their starting points.

Pupils behave well and many demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning. They understand what bullying is, and, while rare at their school, know who to report to should it occur. Improvements to attendance procedures mean that many pupils now attend school regularly with far fewer pupils being persistently absent.

Pupils take part in the wide range of clubs that the school offers. Archery, debating club and mindfulness are just a few of the things they enjoy. Pupils are active citizens and 'courageous advocates', supporting those in need of their support. When they move to secondary school, pupils show their gratitude to Much Birch by purchasing legacy gifts to benefit those that remain at the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Not all pupils are supported to deepen their understanding in mathematics. They are not routinely given the opportunity to apply the facts and calculation methods they learn to problem solving and this impacts on the depth of their understanding. The school should ensure that there are regular opportunities for all pupils to develop their reasoning skills in mathematics.
- In a few subjects, learning sequences are not coherently planned and are not monitored effectively. As a result, pupils' learning is often disconnected and does not build on prior learning. The school should ensure that there are coherent learning sequences so that learning builds progressively on what pupils know and their impact is monitored.

- In some subjects, staff are unfamiliar with the knowledge required to deliver the disciplinary elements of the curriculum. As a result, learning can be driven by activity rather than the subject-specific knowledge staff intend pupils to acquire. The school should ensure that all staff know how to deliver learning sequences as intended.

How can I feed back my views?

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

The Department for Education has further guidance on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for published performance information about the school.

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

School details

Unique reference number	116833
Local authority	Herefordshire
Inspection number	10322748
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	191
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of the governing body	Reverend Mark Johnson
Executive Headteacher	Bernadette Davies
Website	www.much-birch.hereford.sch.uk/
Date of previous inspection	8 November 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Much Birch C of E Primary School has a Church of England Christian faith-based ethos.
- The school's last statutory inspection of Anglican and Methodist schools was carried out in November 2022.
- The school federated with St Mary's C of E in September 2019. These schools share an executive headteacher and governing body.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors met with a range of leaders, including those responsible for the curriculum, teaching and learning, behaviour, attendance, personal development and safeguarding.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, history and physical education. For each deep dive, the inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The lead inspector also heard a selection of pupils read from Years 1, 2 and 3.
- Inspectors also considered the curriculum in other subjects.
- The lead inspector spoke with governors including the chair and vice chair of governors.
- The lead inspector also spoke to the local authority school improvement partner.
- Inspectors considered the survey responses to Ofsted Parent View and the free-text comments from parents.
- Inspectors considered the responses to staff and pupil surveys.

Inspection team

Tony Bradshaw, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Antony Edkins	Ofsted Inspector

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