

Inspection of Birchwood School

Ainscough Road, Birchwood, Warrington WA3 7PW

Inspection dates: 17 to 19 June 2025

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
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Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes
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What is it like to attend this school?

The school has high expectations for pupils. Pupils enjoy their learning. From their different starting points, they achieve well. Pupils are enthused by the enriching activities that the school provides. For example, as part of a visit to the Beatles museum, pupils learned how to budget for trips. Such opportunities significantly enhance pupils' experience of the wider world. Pupils leave the school ready for future learning and ready to lead increasingly independent lives.

Most pupils have found their previous experiences of education difficult. Many have been without education for some time. At Birchwood School, pupils re-engage with learning because staff create a caring environment and a curriculum that inspires pupils to think about their own futures. Staff encourage pupils to be themselves and understand their own needs.

Pupils behave exceptionally well. Staff build trusting relationships that help pupils settle into school routines. The school's approach to behaviour management is based on the pupils and their needs. Pupils focus incredibly well on their learning because of the supportive environment that the school creates. When pupils find things more difficult, expert staff support them in regulating their emotions and getting back on track quickly.

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

The school has established a broad curriculum for pupils to study. The proprietor and staff have established an inspirational vision for pupils to understand their needs and learn how to flourish in the world. This vision is realised in practice. The curriculum is tailored to individual pupils' needs. For example, in personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, the school has carefully considered the areas for pupils to study. For some pupils, this means developing communication skills and early language. For others, this means learning how to budget, build their careers and enjoy safe relationships.

For subjects such as English and mathematics, the school identifies the key knowledge and skills pupils need to learn. For example, pupils learn to read fluently across a range of subjects. In mathematics, pupils persevere when learning more complex concepts such as adding fractions. However, in some subjects, the school has not considered the most important knowledge pupils need to learn as effectively as in others. Sometimes the activities pupils are given are not matched well enough to the important learning they need to acquire.

Pupils arrive at the school with many gaps in their learning. All pupils have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan) to support their special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff meet pupils' needs well. They regularly check pupils' understanding and progress through the curriculum. However, teachers do not use this information consistently well to address gaps in pupils' knowledge. Sometimes,

they move pupils on to new content before they are ready. This means that gaps in pupils' knowledge persist and they do not progress as well as they could.

The school prioritises reading. If pupils are in the early stages of learning to read, the school ensures they receive targeted support to help them become confident and fluent readers. Staff are experts in delivering the school's phonics programme. Over time, pupils who struggle with reading develop the skills they need to access a range of texts across the curriculum.

Staff are skilled at encouraging pupils to behave well. They help pupils understand their emotions and teach them strategies to manage their own behaviour effectively. This results in pupils' highly positive attitudes to learning and contribution to the life of the school. Pupils also make considerable gains in their attendance during their time at the school.

Pupils' personal development is of the highest priority. The school provides opportunities for pupils to discuss matters that affect them. For example, younger pupils discuss how to cope when things change. Older pupils learn how to contribute to wider society, for example by giving blood. All pupils learn about staying safe online and the wider dangers they might face such as bullying and exploitation. Pupils benefit from a range of trips. For many, their first experience of staying away from home is through the residential visits that the school provides. This prepares pupils well for their future lives by building independence and broadening their horizons.

The school provides pupils with an appropriate, impartial careers information, education, advice and guidance programme. It supports pupils in developing a personal careers pathway. As a result of this work, pupils secure college places, mentorship programmes or work. They speak enthusiastically about their next steps and the careers that they are seeking to develop.

The proprietor has appointed leaders with the required expertise to ensure that the independent school standards (the standards) are met consistently. Policies, including a safeguarding policy that meets current statutory requirements, are available to parents and carers on the school's website. The proprietor ensures that the school meets the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

The school ensures that the education it provides has a positive impact on pupils. The proprietor is fully involved in the life of the school and knows the school well. It has a clear oversight of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

The school meets the health and safety and premises requirements. The building is maintained to a high standard, and teaching spaces are bright, clean and well resourced. There is a safe and well-resourced outdoor area where pupils can spend time at breaktimes.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- In some subjects, teachers do not use the information from their checks on pupils' learning consistently well to address gaps in pupils' knowledge. Sometimes, they move pupils on to new content before they are ready. The school should make more consistent use of assessment to plan learning that addresses the gaps in knowledge that pupils have.
- In some subjects, the curriculum does not clearly set out the important knowledge that pupils need to learn. This means that sometimes the activities pupils complete do not match the most important things they need to learn. Consequently, some pupils do not learn as well as they could. The school should ensure that the curriculum is clearly mapped out in all subjects to support teachers in designing appropriate activities that enable pupils to learn well.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	148566
DfE registration number	877/6014
Local authority	Warrington
Inspection number	10375142
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent day school
Age range of pupils	8 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	38
Proprietor	Birchwood Children's Services Ltd
Chair	Terry McKenzie
Headteacher	Deb Chappel
Annual fees (day pupils)	£89,500
Telephone number	01925 202448
Website	www.bwchildservices.com
Email address	deb.chappel@bwchildservices.com
Date of previous inspection	21 to 24 June 2022

Information about this school

- Since the previous standard inspection, the Department for Education (DfE) has commissioned an emergency inspection. This took place on 12 December 2024.
- The school does not make use of alternative provision.
- The school operates from one site based at Ainscough Road, Birchwood, Warrington, WA3 7PW.
- The school is registered to admit up to 40 pupils. The school caters for pupils who have been out of education for extended periods. All pupils on roll at the time of the inspection have an EHC plan. The school caters for pupils with autism.
- Pupils' places are commissioned and funded by the local authority.
- At the time of the inspection, there were a small number of students in the sixth form.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the chair of the proprietor body, the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and members of staff.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, early reading, mathematics and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, considered the curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to staff, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also talked to leaders, staff and pupils about some other subjects.
- 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.
- During the inspection, inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including those relating to safeguarding. They also reviewed information relating to the standards

and made a tour of the premises. Inspectors also looked at records of pupils' behaviour and attendance.

- Inspectors spoke with some parents and carers and took account of their views.
- Staff views were considered during discussions with them and through their responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff. To gather the views of pupils, inspectors spoke informally with pupils throughout the inspection.

The school's progress in meeting previously failed standards

During the inspection we checked whether the school now meets the independent school standards that it was judged to have failed at its previous emergency inspection on 12 December 2024.

- The outcome of this part of the inspection is: **the school now meets the previously failed standards.**
- At the time of the previous emergency inspection in December 2024, the proprietor did not have sufficient oversight of the school's safeguarding procedures. There were found to be weaknesses and inaccuracies in the school's records of safeguarding concerns. In addition, the school's safer recruitment checks were incomplete, and some information was not included on the school's single central record. The proprietor did not have robust arrangements in place for checking whether the standards were being consistently met.
- At the time of this progress monitoring inspection, safeguarding concerns were logged accurately and followed up consistently. Additionally, all checks on members of the proprietor body had been completed.
- At the time of the emergency inspection, the proprietor's understanding of the standards was uneven. There was a lack of knowledge and expertise related to the proprietor's statutory responsibilities.
- At the time of the progress monitoring inspection, the proprietor has ensured that it has the knowledge required to ensure that all of the standards are met and that systems to ensure pupils' welfare, health and safety are robust. The school has appropriate systems in place to check that all standards are consistently met over time.

The school now meets the following standards

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 7 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that-
 - 7(a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 20(6) The standard in this paragraph is met in relation to an individual ("MB"), not being the Chair of the school, who is a member of a body of persons corporate or unincorporate named as the proprietor of the school in the register or in an application to enter the school in the register, if-

- 20(6)(b) subject to sub-paragraphs (7) to (8), the Chair of the school makes the following checks relating to MB–
- 20(6)(b)(i) where relevant to the individual, an enhanced criminal record check.
- 21(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor keeps a register which shows such of the information referred to in sub-paragraphs (3) to (7) as is applicable to the school in question.
- 21(3) The information referred to in this sub-paragraph is–
 - 21(3)(a) in relation to each member of staff ("S") appointed on or after 1st May 2007, whether–
 - 21(3)(a)(i) S's identity was checked.
- 21(6) The information referred to in this sub-paragraph is, in relation each member ("MB") of a body of persons named as the proprietor appointed on or after 1st May 2007, whether the checks referred to in paragraph 20(6)(b) were made, the date they were made and the date on which the resulting certificate was obtained.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school–
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
 - 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

Inspection team

Jen Sloan, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Gil Bourgade

Ofsted Inspector

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