

Birchwood School

Ainscough Road, Birchwood, Warrington WA3 7PW

Inspection date

10 July 2025

Overall outcome

The school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material changes relating to the school provision are implemented

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraphs 1 to 2(2)(c)

- The school has put in place an appropriate curriculum for key stage 1 pupils that clearly sets out the key knowledge that pupils should acquire in all subjects. This matches the aims and ambition of the national curriculum. The desired learning is also designed to cater for the aptitudes and abilities of the pupils that the school intends to admit, most of whom are likely to have cognition and learning needs. The schemes of work are aimed at ensuring that pupils gain the fundamental knowledge that they will need for the next steps in their education.

Paragraph 2(2)(d) to 2(A)(3)

- The school has woven aspects of pupils' personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education throughout the curriculum. The school intends to teach pupils about equalities and fundamental British values. There is also strong emphasis on ensuring that pupils have the skills that they need to be increasingly independent.
- There is an age-appropriate relationships and sex education (RSE) and health education scheme of work in place for key stage 1 pupils. Should the material change to the age range be approved, this is likely to provide pupils with the knowledge and understanding that they will need in preparation for key stage 2.

Paragraphs 3 to 4

- The school has put in place clear steps in learning. It will use these to check on how well pupils progress through the curriculum. This matches well with the provision already in place. The school's focus on adapting the curriculum, according to any special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) needs that pupils may have, demonstrates high expectations for pupils' learning.
- The proprietor has strong systems in place for staff recruitment as well as arrangements for their induction. It aims to develop the school slowly to ensure that staff know pupils well and understand their SEND needs. The proprietor also intends to ensure that staff are trained well to deliver the curriculum to a high standard.

- The proprietor has ensured that these independent school standards (the standards) are likely to be met if the material change is approved.

Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Paragraph 5 to 5(d)(iii)

- The intended curriculum includes strong promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development in the curriculum. Leaders have recently revised the schemes of work for SMSC and PSHE in key stage 1. These feature targeted development of pupils' confidence with social skills, as well as an awareness of others' views.
- The school's intended SMSC programme follows themes that are revisited throughout pupils' time at the school. It is intended that pupils will learn to respect difference, as well as develop their knowledge of other faiths. The proprietor intends that these arrangements for key stage 1 will lay the foundations for pupils' future personal development.
- The proprietor has ensured that these standards are likely to be met if the material change is approved.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Part 6 Provision of information

Paragraphs 7, 7(a), 7(b), 32(1)(c)

- The school publishes its safeguarding policy on its website. The policy incorporates the most recent statutory guidance. It provides staff with clear direction of what to do if they think a pupil could be at risk of harm.

Paragraphs 11, 12, 14, 16 to 16(b)

- The school has appropriate policies and checks in place to ensure pupils' health and safety. For example, the school's risk assessment policy provides a clear process for staff to follow when assessing any risks.
- The school has appropriate risk assessments in place for a range of activities. This includes individual assessments that focus on providing for pupils' needs. For current pupils, this results in a calm atmosphere where staff know pupils well.
- The school has ensured that an appropriate fire risk assessment is carried out to meet the requirements of the Fire Safety Order 2005. These are supported by regular maintenance checks.
- The proprietor has ensured that these standards are likely to be met if the material change is approved.

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

Paragraphs 17 to 18(2)(e), 18(3), 19(2) to 19(2)(d)(ii), 19(3), 20(6) to 20(6)(c), 21(1) to 21(3)(b), and 21(5) to 21(6)

- The proprietor ensures that all staff undergo the required pre-employment checks before starting work at the school. These checks are listed on the school's single

central record. This is kept securely in an electronic format and is checked by the designated safeguarding lead and the proprietor on a regular basis.

- The checks for teachers' qualifications, medical fitness, suitability for management or governance, the eligibility of staff to work in the UK and checks on staff returning from overseas are all in place.
- The chair of the proprietor body has ensured that all relevant checks have been carried out on board members.
- There are rigorous arrangements in place to make sure that all employment checks on supply staff have been carried out by the agencies that the school uses. Steps are taken to ensure that the identity of any member of supply staff is checked by the school on arrival.
- The proprietor has ensured that these standards are likely to be met if the material change is approved.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 22 to 23(1)(c), 24(1) to 24(1)(b), 24(2), 25 to 29(1)(b)

- The school's site currently comprises a single-storey block based off one central corridor with four smaller wings. Part of the site was previously used for boarders and these former bedrooms have been converted successfully into small classrooms. The proprietor has stringent checks in place to ensure that the entire premises are kept in a good condition.
- The acoustics and lighting in all classrooms are suitable.
- There are numerous toilet facilities for pupils, which are separate from those for staff. All cubicles can be locked from the inside. There are separate toilet facilities for boys and girls.
- The proprietor has ensured that there are two suitable medical rooms which incorporate smaller rooms with their own washing and toilet facilities.
- All drinking water throughout the premises is clearly labelled.
- There is external lighting for safe entry and exit. There are a number of grassed spaces across the premises for pupils to access during breaktimes and for physical education.
- The premises allow adequate space for the proposed increase in pupil numbers.
- The proprietor has ensured that these standards are likely to be met if the material change is approved.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34(1) to 34(1)(c)

- The proprietor is kept well informed by regular meetings with the headteacher. These provide a commentary on compliance with the standards as well as pupils' achievement and curriculum development. This is further strengthened by the proprietor's quality assurance procedures through their regular visits to the provision.

The proprietor has relevant professional knowledge that it brings to its role when questioning leaders about the quality of the provision.

- The proprietor ensures that there are effective arrangements in place for the welfare of pupils. The individual profiles and risk assessments that cater for pupils' needs provide strong assurance that pupils' well-being is prioritised well.
- The school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. It has a comprehensive accessibility plan in place that includes actions to ensure that all disabled pupils can access a relevant curriculum.
- The proprietor intends to develop the school steadily. This ensures that there is support and development for senior and middle leaders so that the proposed changes can be actioned without compromising the quality of the provision.
- The proprietor intends to admit pupils in small numbers over time to ensure that staff workload is manageable and that any disruption to present pupils is minimised.
- The proprietor has ensured that these standards are likely to be met if the material change is approved.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school is likely to meet the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that are relevant to the material change.

School details

Unique reference number	148566
DfE registration number	877/6014
Inspection number	10405120

This inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's likely compliance with the independent school standards relevant to the material change that the school has applied to make.

Type of school	Independent special school
School status	Independent school
Proprietor	Birchwood Children's Services Ltd
Chair	Terry McKenzie
Headteacher	Deb Chappel
Annual fees (day pupils)	£86,500
Telephone number	01925 202448
Website	www.bwchildservices.com
Email address	deb.chappel@bwchildservices.com
Date of previous standard inspection	17 to 19 June 2025

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	8 to 19	5 to 19	5 to 19
Number of pupils on the school roll	38	80	80

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Mixed
Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	40	80
Number of part-time pupils	0	0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	40	80
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	40	80
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	40	80

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	8	20
Number of part-time teaching staff	0	0

Information about this school

- The school operates from premises at Ainscough Road, Birchwood, Warrington WA3 7PW.
- The proprietor previously operated a children's home on the same site. That provision has now ceased to operate. The school proposes to use this part of the property to accommodate the proposed increase in pupil numbers.
- The school caters for pupils with autism. All pupils have an education, health and care plan. Pupil places are commissioned and funded by a variety of local authorities. The school is registered to admit up to 40 pupils.
- The school's previous standard inspection took place in June 2025. Prior to this, an emergency inspection took place on 12 December 2024.

- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education in response to the proprietor body's request to make two material changes to the school. The proposed changes involve a change in the school's age range to extend the provision to include five- to eight-year-old pupils, as well as an increase in numbers to cater for 80 pupils. There is no intended change to the school's SEND offer under the proposed material change.
- This was the second material change inspection for the extension to the school's admissions number. The preceding material change inspection took place on 10 October 2023. This was the first material change inspection in respect of the change to the age range for the school.
- In evaluating whether the school is likely to meet the relevant standards should the material change be approved, the inspector undertook a review of curriculum information, visited lessons, considered a range of documentation related to the standards and discussed the proposed changes with the leaders, including the headteacher, the chair of the proprietor body and one company director.
- The inspection also considered the school's safeguarding arrangements, including the single central record of pre-employment checks and whether the school's safeguarding policy is available to parents and carers. These requirements of the independent school standards are met.

Inspection team

Steve Bentham, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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