



School Prospectus

Dear Parents



Thank you for expressing an interest in enrolling your child at our school. We believe it is our privilege to have your child at The Birches Primary School and we fully appreciate the trust you are placing in us. Throughout this booklet I have included comments written about our school by The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) who provide Inspection Services for the Department of Education.

We have high expectations of all of our children and we seek to ensure that each child develops to his/her full potential spiritually, academically, socially and personally.

Birches Primary School has dedicated and committed staff who strive to provide the best education and opportunities for children throughout their time in our school. We seek to provide a caring environment which will produce happy, secure, well adjusted children who are proud of their achievements.

'The working relationships are excellent at all levels; all the members of staff are highly committed to the care and well being of the children.'

(page 2 ETI)

We recognise that parental support and involvement is crucial to the well-being of children and believe that active communication and partnership with parents play a significant part in ensuring children reach their full potential.

'The parents reported their high regard for the staff and the leadership of the school, the care and support provided by all of the staff for the children and the inclusive ethos of the school.'

(page 1 ETI)

This prospectus gives us the opportunity to tell you about life in Birches Primary School and what we can offer your child. I hope you find it interesting and informative. However, no booklet can convey the real atmosphere of the school. I therefore warmly invite you to visit us and see what our school can offer. Further information our school can also be found on our web-site at www.birchesps.co.uk

I look forward to meeting you in the near future.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Watson (Mrs)



Birches Primary School has been providing high quality education for children in this area for over forty years.

Our school occupies a large pleasant site close to the M1, 0.62 miles south of Lough Neagh, six miles from Portadown.

Children who attend Birches Primary School are from a variety of backgrounds and bring with them their own characters and experiences which knit together into one happy family.

Our school is a focal point in the local community and we enjoy strong relationships with local organisations and churches. We also have strong links with local primary schools and take part in a range of sporting events throughout the year.

We encourage parental involvement in school life and have an 'open-door' philosophy. Over the last number of years we have organised a range of information sessions for parents including the DELTA programme and literacy and numeracy evenings. We value the opinions and ideas of our parents and consult with them on various issues in school.

Our PTA 'Friends of Birches Association' organise a wide range of fund-raising events and activities for the children. We have a child-centred approach where children are encouraged to extend their learning throughout school. Children take an active role in school life through the Eco Team and playtime Team.

'A strength of the school includes the inclusive and supportive ethos of the school exemplified through the excellent working relationships at all levels and the outstanding quality of the pastoral provision.' (page 7 ETI)



Aims



It shall be the policy of the Board of Governors to ensure, as far as possible, the provision of all necessary resources to implement the following aims are made available to the school.

General School Aims

Based on the premise that:

- Every child is unique and has a positive contribution to make to society
- All children should have access to all educational resources depending on needs

'The children are well-motivated and display very positive attitudes to their work.'
(page 3 ETI)

The Board of Governors accept the following aims to be beneficial and desirable for the school.

1. The development of the practical skills, attitudes, concepts and values required in everyday life.
2. The development and encouragement of creative thought and expression.
3. Encourage each child to be independent and a responsible individual.
4. The provision for opportunities for children to explore, question and reason.
5. Children should be given the opportunity to acquire, record and use information.
6. Children should be given the

opportunity to operate and use technical equipment.

7. Children should be encouraged to understand, respect and accept the views of other cultures in the community.
8. The development of spiritual, moral, physical, emotional and social attitudes of the children.
9. Opportunities to be given to each child to attain their highest level of attainment in each area of study.

These aims will be developed through the Northern Ireland Curriculum as laid down in the Programmes of Study which will:

- Be broad based and practical where appropriate;
- Encourage independent learning;
- Place equal worth on all areas of study;
- Be planned around attitudes, skills, concepts, values and knowledge;
- Take account of individual needs.

'A significant strength is that the children take responsibility for aspects of their own learning; they co-operate well with one another, work effectively in groups and undertake independent tasks with confidence.'
(page 3 ETI)

In selecting children for admission to the school we apply the criteria as set out in the Education and Library Board's Handbook, a copy of which is available with an Application Form.

I will be pleased to meet with any parents who would like to visit the school. Please contact school to arrange a mutually convenient time. Parents of children beginning school in September will be invited to an Induction Meeting in June at which time they will be given some practical information and advice to help make their child's transition into school as smooth as possible.

Children entering P1 will be invited for a visit to school in June. This will help them to become more familiar with their surroundings and make them feel more at ease.

Parents who wish to transfer their children from another school can arrange an interview with myself. If a place is available, the parents and children will be invited to meet the class teachers and view the premises.

School Attendance

Regular school attendance is required by law. We place a high priority on punctual and regular attendance due to the impact this can have on a child's ability to reach his or her full potential. Attendance is monitored regularly in liaison with our Educational Welfare Officer. A child who is absent from school MUST, on returning, bring a note of explanation from the parent. Due to our computerised system it is essential to have a reason for each absence. Each child's attendance for the year will be documented on the annual school report.

Please arrange family holidays and appointments outside school time.

School Attendance

The Board of Governors consists of representatives of the Area Board, Transferors, parents and staff. It has a considerable responsibility for the management of the school and acts in close association with the Principal, who is secretary to the Board of Governors but is unable to vote at meetings of the Board of Governors.

'The governors contribute appropriately to the overall strategic planning and policy development for the school.' (page 6 ITI)



Holiday Arrangements

The school will be closed for the months of July and August and for all statutory holidays. Information about other holidays will be sent to parents in the Autumn Term.

In the event of an emergency closure every attempt will be made to notify parents to enable them to make alternative arrangements.



School Information

The school hours are as follows:

School opens 8.30am

P1	8.40 am – 1.25 pm	
P2	8.40 am – 1.35 pm	
P3	8.40 am – 1.45 pm	Tuesdays and Wednesdays
	8.40 am – 2.35 pm	Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays
P4 – P7	8.40 am – 2.35 pm	

Break Time 10.30 am - 10.45 am

Lunchtime 12.00 pm - 12.45 pm

School Uniform

We have a school uniform which we prefer children to wear. We believe it gives them a sense of identity as well as reflecting the individuality of our school.

Girls Uniform	Boys Uniform	PE Uniform
Grey skirt/pinafore	Grey trousers	White polo shirt
Royal blue school sweatshirt	Royal blue school sweatshirt	Black shorts
White polo shirt	White polo shirt	Black plimsoles
Black shoes (with low heel for safety reasons)	Black shoes	
Blue checked summer dress in third term		

- All children will need the above PE kit
- This can be kept in school. Key Stage 2 children will at times need a tracksuit and trainers for outdoor PE
- The uniform and PE kit can be purchased from Ivan Jameson in Portadown



Award Winning School Meals

We are delighted to have won the coveted trophy awarded by the Northern Ireland School Caterers Association (NISCA). This is a biannual competition to find the school showing the best community links between the school meals kitchen and the school to promote healthy eating. Our school won the 'Best School in the Southern Education and Library Board' trophy and went on to win the 'Best School in Northern Ireland' Silver Plate.

Positive Lunchtime Experience

At Birches Primary School it is our intention that all pupils will have a positive lunchtime experience and make our mealtimes a social occasion. Our school meals are of a high quality and they meet the 'Nutritional Standards for School Lunches and Other Food in Schools'.

We encourage parents to provide nutritionally well-balanced packed lunches that are high in protein, fibre and water and low in fat, sugar and salt.

Mobile Phones

Mobile Phones are not permitted in school.

Jewellery

In the interests of health and safety, children are not permitted to wear any jewellery other than a watch. Earrings and necklaces are not to be worn.

Charging and Remissions Policy

In line with the requirements of the Northern Ireland Education Reform Order 1989, it is the policy of the Board of Governors to:

- Maintain the right to free school education for all children
- Ensure the activities organised wholly or mainly during school time are available to all pupils
- Confirm the right to invite voluntary contributions for the benefit of the school or in support of activities organised by the school; make charges in respect of optional extras, as determined by the Board of Governors

Healthy Breaks and Water

Research indicates that drinking water is not only healthy but improves concentration levels. We therefore have installed a chilled, filtered drinking water fountain and children are encouraged to drink still water throughout the day in class. We operate a healthy eating break where children are encouraged to bring a healthy break including fruit, vegetables, cheese, pancake or bread and butter.



'The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example, through the provision of well-planned playground activities and the contribution of the 'Incredible Edibles Mini-Business' team to promoting healthy food choices, which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.'

(page 2 ETI)

Foundation Stage

A healthy break is provided for children in P1 and P2 for a charge of £1.00 Per week.



Key Stage One and Two Mini-Business

Children from P6 and P7 have a mini-business selling fruit, pancakes, toast, crackers, cheese, breadsticks and other healthy snacks. These are sold to children from P3 to P7 for their break. The money which they make from the business is given to the Eco and Playtime Teams to decide on how it is spent.

OUR SCHOOL IS A NUT, KIWI AND SESAME SEED FREE ZONE

Playtime Team and Eco Team

These children are elected by their peers at the beginning of the year. They work with a designated teacher to discuss a range of issues and ideas to enhance their school. The aim of having these teams is to allow children to feel that their ideas are listened to and that they can actively make decisions regarding their school.

Representatives from P4 to P7 are chosen each year to become members of the Eco Team. They hold regular meetings each term and work hard towards making their school clean and more environmentally friendly. The school have achieved the bronze and silver Eco Awards and are currently working towards the Green Flag Award.



Playtime Team

Our Playtime team consists of representatives from Years 3 to 7. These children have successfully applied for grants to brighten up their playground and have attractive markings for games, picnic benches and flower planters. They wear special T-shirts when they are on duty and are in charge of organising games and equipment for break and lunchtimes.



We are very proud of our high standards in teaching and learning and we always endeavour to provide a broadly balanced curriculum for all of the children.

'Strengths of the school include the high quality of the teaching, which was evaluated as very good or outstanding in most of the lessons and the excellent standards achieved by the children in English and mathematics.'
(page 7 ETI)

Stages of the Primary Curriculum:

- **The Foundation Stage:** Years 1 and 2
- **Key Stage 1:** Years 3 and 4
- **Key Stage 2:** Years 5, 6 and 7

Children are given the opportunity for practical involvement in all the areas of learning.

'The teachers employ an effective range of strategies to develop active learning. The development of purposeful paired and group work, through practical and well-planned follow-on activities, catered well for the wide range of the children's abilities and, in particular, developed very well their thinking skills and personal capabilities.'
(page 5 ETI)

Areas of Learning in the Primary Curriculum:

- Language and Literacy
- Mathematics and Numeracy
- The Arts
- The World Around Us
- Physical Education
- Religious Education
- Personal Development and Mutual Understanding

The curriculum in Birches Primary School also develops a range of skills and capabilities by infusing skills throughout these Areas of Learning.

'The overall quality of provision in English and literacy is outstanding. The school has developed a literacy rich environment to support the children's learning. Across all key stages, the children demonstrate enjoyment, confidence and increasing self-reliance in literacy. The children develop and use skills in talking, listening, reading and writing in meaningful contexts.'
(page 3 ETI)

The Cross-Curricular Skills are:

- Communication
- Using Mathematics
- Using ICT

'The whole-school programme for mathematics provides a clear progression in the children's learning of mathematical concepts, skills and language.'
(page 4 ETI)

There is also key focus on developing Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities throughout all learning experiences in Birches Primary School.

'Across the key stages, the children respond well to the high expectations set by the teachers, and they are provided with a wide range of opportunities to develop and apply their thinking skills and personal capabilities.'
(page 3 ETI)



At Birches Primary School all reasonable steps will be taken to provide access to an appropriate education that affords the opportunity for every child to achieve his or her full potential regardless of special educational need or disability in accordance with the Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005.

Arrangements for Children with Special Educational Needs

'A strength of the school is the very good provision for children with special educational needs' (page 7 ETI)

We seek to provide a learning environment for all children in our school which is caring, happy and relevant to their individual requirements. As such, differentiation is an integral part of teaching but there will be times when some children attending the school may have special educational needs. The Special Needs Coordinator, Miss Anderson, liaises with the appropriate departments of the SELB and other professionals, including the Psychology Service to ensure children's identified needs are being catered for. Parents will be kept informed if their child requires additional support.

'The children's needs are identified at an early stage and well-focused IEPs provide appropriate guidance for their work.' (page 6 ETI)

Parental Concerns

Parents are welcome to express any concerns they may have relating to their child. Parents should:

- Stage 1** Contact the class teacher
- Stage 2** Contact the Principal
- Stage 3** Contact the Chairman of the Board of Governors
- Stage 4** Request that the matter be considered by the SELB

In the vast majority of cases, the concern will be addressed at Stages 1 or 2.

Homework

We consider homework to be a meaningful extension, reinforcement and revision of work undertaken in class and a means by which we can promote children's self-discipline and independence.

Parents are encouraged to supervise homework activities as we believe that homework is a vital means of forging a learning link between the home and school, consolidating work carried out.

Religious Education

Birches Primary School is a non-denominational Christian school with a strong Christian ethos. A whole school assembly is held on Monday and Thursday mornings. Assemblies provide an opportunity for collective worship and celebration. Ministers from local Churches take the whole school for assembly on Thursday mornings.





Child Protection

'The children indicated they are happy and secure in school and know what to do and who to turn to if they have any concerns about their work, or their safety and well-being.'

(page 2 ETI)

At Birches Primary School, the welfare of each child is our paramount consideration. We understand that a balance must be struck between protecting children and respecting the rights and needs of parents and family but where there is conflict, the child's interests must always come first.

Birches Primary School has a policy for Child Protection which aims to protect all the children in its care by ensuring that everyone who works in the school: teachers, non-teaching staff and volunteers have clear guidance on the detection and inter-agency management of situations where abuse, bullying or neglect of a child is suspected.

In keeping with the Department of Education's Document 2003/13 we have a Designated Teacher for Child Protection, Miss Anderson who liaises closely with parents and relevant outside bodies as necessary. Copies of Child Protection, Pastoral Care and Behaviour Management Policies are available upon request.

Safety In School

Whilst wishing to extend a warm welcome to all our visitors, we are conscious of the need to provide a safe, secure environment for all children and staff. To this end, our entrance door has been fitted

with a security lock and we ask visitors to sign the visitors register when they enter the school. Visitors to school include: Music Tutors, School Nurse, Representatives from Charity Organisations and Sports Coaches.

Using ICT

'The children use a wide range of ICT applications with confidence and make informed decisions about the effective use of ICT in English and mathematics.'

(page 3 ETI)

Children at Birches Primary School are provided with many opportunities to develop their ICT skills throughout the Curriculum. Each classroom has an Interactive Whiteboard which is used on a daily basis to enhance the learning environment. All of the computers are connected to a central network and have safe access to the Internet. The children make use of a wide range of ICT equipment to enhance their learning.

'The teachers make good use of computer programs, interactive whiteboards, programmable devices and websites to support learning and teaching in literacy and numeracy.' (page 3 ETI)





‘A very good family and community ethos exists in the school and this is underpinned by caring, supportive and inclusive practices.’
(page 2 ETI)

Pastoral Care

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is outstanding (page 2 ETI)

At Birches Primary School we are concerned with the well-being and overall development of each child in our care. We therefore strive to create a happy, secure and well organised environment in which our children feel valued, and in which they can grow personally, socially, spiritually and intellectually.

Every member of staff is committed to looking after the pastoral needs of the children at Birches Primary School. We recognise that children cannot work to their full potential if they have anxieties or worries and we welcome information from parents and children when problems at home or school may be causing distress or anxiety.

Statement about the school policy on Anti-Bullying, Child Protection, SEN and Discipline will be available to parents when their children start school.

When a child is sick or injured our first action is to inform the parent or other contact available to us. Should this not be possible, we will seek medical treatment for the child in all cases where we feel this is necessary. A medical record must be completed for each child before he/she starts school.

It is our policy to act in the best interests of the child and provide a comfortable and safe learning environment at all times.

‘The needs of the children are accorded paramount importance in the school and the holistic approach by the staff to the children’s development meets their personal, social and emotional needs very well. (page 11 ETI)

'The children are very welcoming and their behaviour, both in and out of class, is exemplary.'
(page 2 ETI)

The focus of our school discipline policy is to emphasise positive behaviour. We use sanctions when necessary but focus on a reward system – Good To Be Green. We believe that good discipline and seemly behaviour are a result of happy children, motivated, interested and working well at class activities.

'A whole school approach to promoting and rewarding positive behaviour encourages the children to develop their talents as well as raising their confidence and self-esteem.'
(page 2 ETI)

Aims

1. To have a disciplined, caring and happy environment conducive to learning.
2. To encourage the development of self-discipline, self-esteem, independence and respect for the feelings and opinions of others.

Anti-Bullying

At Birches Primary school, we take a proactive approach to bullying. Bullying and its effects are explained through Circle Time, Assemblies and in a wide variety of ways.

We endeavour to provide an environment which:

- Is safe, caring and free from intimidation and fear
- Provides challenges and is non-threatening
- Encourages children to feel secure and promotes self esteem
- Values children's opinions and makes it easier for them to share concerns
- Shows an awareness of children's individual needs and makes an effort to meet these

Drugs Education

Birches Primary School is a caring, responsible school with the children at the core of our activities. We strive to respond to the personal, social and emotional needs of our children through our interaction with them in the classroom and beyond.

The emphasis of our drugs education programme is on the dangers involved in the misuse of tobacco, alcohol and medicine. As our programme responds to needs, we will include other substances when appropriate. The programme is delivered mainly through PDMU (Personal Development and mutual Understanding).

All other subjects contribute to this, where and when appropriate. We recognise this as a partnership between the school and the parents, where we work together toward educating and preparing our children for each stage of their lives.

Assessment

'There is a coherent approach to the use of formative, summative and diagnostic forms of assessment throughout the school.' (page 2 ETI)

Assessment is an integral part of the learning process through which teachers build a comprehensive picture of the progress and learning needs of each child in order to plan future work and ultimately improve learning. Assessment is continuous, allowing teachers to build up a systematic record of children's progress and achievement throughout the year and key stage.



Improvement in Assessment for Learning is enhanced by:

- The active involvement of children in their own learning
- Sharing learning intentions with children
- Helping children develop an awareness of the skills and knowledge that are being fostered
- Helping children develop an awareness of the strategies they employ in their learning
- Children reviewing and evaluating their own work
- Children setting their own goals
- Understanding how to improve their own work
- A varied range of assessment techniques used as an integral part of the learning and teaching process

‘On many occasions, the children reflect on their learning through plenary sessions or through peer or self-assessment. In the Foundation Stage, the children’s play-based learning experiences provide them with excellent opportunities to develop their problem-solving capabilities, greater independence and connected learning. Across the Key Stages, the children respond well to the high expectations set by the teachers, and they are provided with a wide range of opportunities to develop and apply their thinking skills and personal capabilities.’ (page 3 ETI)

All of the various assessments are collated, recorded and used to produce a report for parents at the end of each school year. Parents are also invited to meet the class teacher to discuss their child’s performance in November.

‘The annual reports on the children are detailed, informative and indicate clearly to parents how they can reinforce and contribute to the education of their child.’ (page 5 ETI)

Extra Curricular Activities

‘The children value the help and support of their teachers, they have great pride in their school and they enjoy the wide range of extra-curricular activities provided for them.’ (page 2 ETI)

The school involves the children in a range of activities both during and after school.

Musical and creative talents are encouraged through recorder groups, choral groups and performances throughout the year at various school functions.

String and woodwind tuition is offered to children through the SELB Music Service.



We also offer a wide variety of sporting activities both during and after school. The children have experience of the following clubs as they progress through the school:

- Music and Drama
- Dance
- Football
- Netball
- Basketball
- Scripture Union
- Tennis
- Cycling Proficiency
- Rugby Tots
- Multi Skills
- Science
- Scrapbooking
- Rugby
- Teddy Tennis
- Gardening
- Hockey
- Art and Design

In P6 and 7 the children are offered the opportunity to go to an outdoor pursuits centre to take parting a range of outdoor activities.

'The extensive range of extra-curricular activities and opportunities to participate in inter-school competitions enrich the children's learning experiences.' (page 2 ETI)

Links With Parents and The Community

We value the support of parents and members of the local community and promote involvement in many ways including:

- Newsletters
- School Functions
- Fund-raising Events
- Sporting Events
- DELTA Workshops
- Curricular Information Sessions
- Community Programmes

Friends of Birches Association

We have a Parents' Association called 'The Friends of Birches Association' who meet at least once a term to organise fund-raising events to take place throughout the school year.

'The Friends of Birches' group, involving parents, teachers and other community representatives, provides valuable support to the school as well as raising funds to enhance the quality of the learning experiences for the children.' (page 2 ETI)

Parent-Teacher Consultations

Parents will have opportunities to assess their children's progress through the annual interviews with the class teacher, the end of Key Stage assessments and via school reports.

All parents will be invited during the first term of the school year to meet the class teachers and discuss their children's progress. In Primary 1, parents will also have a Baseline Assessment interview in September. In Primary 7, parents whose children will be transferring to Secondary Education will be invited to discuss their child's transfer report and meet the necessary administrative requirements.

'There are effective procedures in place to keep the parents well informed about their children's progress; these include written reports, formal parent-teacher consultations and opportunities are provided for parents to meet with the teachers as the need arises.' (page 5 ETI)



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