

Birches

Primary School



BIRCHES PRIMARY SCHOOL



Prospectus



A very warm welcome to Birches Primary School

It is a pleasure to present to you Birches Primary School's prospectus. If this is your first child to join us in Birches Primary School, we welcome you as parents and look forward to a happy and successful association over the coming years. To those of you who already have children here, we are pleased to renew the links between us.

This prospectus provides some information about the school, its aims, curriculum and activities. Our school is very much a family school which has served the local community for over fifty years. The school is known for its warm, welcoming and inclusive ethos and commitment to high academic standards. We have dedicated and committed staff who strive to provide the best education and opportunities for children throughout their time in our school and place great emphasis on creating active learning partnerships between home and school.

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 about our school can also be found on our website at www.birchesps.com

Please feel free to make an appointment to view the school and I will be delighted to have the opportunity to show you round personally. I look forward to meeting you in the near future.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Watson (Mrs)
Principal





About Our School

Birches Primary School has been providing high quality education for children in this area for over fifty 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 Shared Education and 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 internet safety, 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 and we promote care and respect for the school and the local and global environments.



Board of Governors

The School's Board of Governors consists of representatives from the Education Authority, Transferors, Parents and Staff.

The Governors at Birches Primary School take a very keen interest in the life and well-being of the school, staff and pupils. They have considerable responsibility and accountability for the school and make decisions about financial management, curriculum, maintenance of premises, staff appointments, admissions and enrolments, community links and pastoral care including child protection, safeguarding and discipline.

The Governors are highly supportive of the work of the school and work closely with the Principal and staff to ensure all children fulfil their potential in all areas of the curriculum.

'Shaping tomorrow today'

Vision for our school

Birches Primary School is a vibrant, happy school which will provide a safe and motivating environment where every pupil is valued and supported to become confident individuals, challenged and successful learners and responsible young people. Central to this vision is the development of a caring Christian ethos.

Birches Primary School aims to help pupils:

- To feel happy and secure and to develop high self-esteem – respecting themselves, others and the environment
- Develop Christian values and respect the beliefs and opinions of others
- Take responsibility for their own behaviour and actions
- Achieve academically to their highest standard
- Develop a range of communication, practical and technological skills
- Gain life skills e.g. personal safety, problem solving
- Work independently, creatively and collaboratively
- Become confident, well-motivated, inquisitive life-long learners



Admissions and Visiting the School

Admissions

When considering which children should be selected for admission, the Board of Governors will only take into account information which is detailed on or attached to the application form. Should the school be oversubscribed, pupils will be admitted according to the criteria as listed in order of priority. The admissions criteria are available on the Admissions Portal on the Education Authority website - <https://www.eani.org.uk> or on request from the Principal.

Duty to Verify

The Board of Governors reserves the right to require such supplementary evidence as it may determine to support or verify information on any application form, e.g. a utility bill.

Waiting List Policy

We do not operate a waiting list policy.

Admission to P2 - P7

Requests for places in P2-P7 classes will be considered provided that the total enrolment number has not been reached and that additional enrolments will not significantly increase individual class numbers. If a place is available, the parents and children will be invited to meet the class teacher and view the premises.

Induction of New Pupils

- 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.

The involvement of parents in the education of their children is critically important and to this end we want to ensure that parents are informed as fully as possible about their children's progress.



Parental Involvement

The school attaches great importance to the involvement of parents in their child's education and tries to offer not only the opportunity to discuss the progress of their child with the individual teachers but also to attend activities such as concerts, plays and curriculum information sessions.

Homework / Home Learning

At Birches Primary School we recognise that education is a responsibility shared between school and home and we appreciate the interest, help and co-operation of parents. Homework is usually further practice of work already learnt in school and will include reading, spellings, number facts and written activities. Homework is seen as an important part of each child's education. All parents are asked to give some time each evening to talk with their child/children about school work and to check over homework.

Parents can help with homework in the following ways:

1. Taking an interest in what the child is working at.
2. Asking questions that show interest and involvement in the work being attempted.
3. Providing a quiet place for the work to be done.
4. Looking over the homework when it is completed to check the presentation and accuracy of the work.

Teaching and Learning

Children are bursting with curiosity and really enjoy finding out about new things. In school all children follow the Northern Ireland Curriculum. The curriculum encourages children to think for themselves, to solve problems in a practical way and generally to become more independent. It is also hoped that children will see their learning in a connected way instead of different, discrete subjects.

Stages of the Primary Curriculum

- The Foundation Stage: P1 and P2
- Key Stage 1: P3 and P4
- Key Stage 2: P5, P6 and P7



Areas of learning in the Primary Curriculum:

1. Language and Literacy (including Talking and Listening, Reading and Writing)
2. Mathematics and Numeracy (focusing on the development of mathematical concepts and numeracy across the curriculum)
3. The Arts (including Art & Design, Drama and Music)
4. The World Around Us (focusing on the development of knowledge, skills and understanding in Geography, History and Science and Technology)
5. Personal Development and Mutual Understanding - PDMU (focusing on emotional, social skills, learning to learn, health, relationships and mutual understanding in the local and global community)
6. Physical Education (developing knowledge, skills and understanding through play and a range of physical activities)
7. Religious Education (an additional area of learning)

Whole Curriculum Skills and Capabilities

At the heart of our curriculum lies an emphasis on the development of core skills and capabilities for lifelong learning as well as the shaping of good citizens. Literacy, Numeracy and using ICT are developed through all areas of learning as are the children's thinking skills and personal capabilities.

Our dedicated teachers employ a range of different teaching approaches (whole class, group and individual), depending on the needs of the children and the subject being covered. Activities are carefully matched to pupils' individual needs and abilities to ensure effective learning.

Attendance

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. A child who is absent from school must, on returning, bring a note of explanation from the parent. Each child's attendance for the year will be documented on the annual school report.

Please arrange family holidays and appointments outside school time.

Punctuality

We would ask that pupils arrive on time each morning as it is very unsettling for pupils if they have to walk into their classroom late after the learning has started for the day. At the end of the day we ask that parents ensure that appropriate arrangements have been made for their child's pick up.

Music

Children have the opportunity to receive music tuition from the EA Music Service who provide tuition in woodwind, brass, strings and drums and percussion.

Swimming

At Birches Primary School our P4 - P7 children receive a block of swimming instruction throughout the year. We strongly encourage every child to participate as swimming promotes good health, increases endurance, and develops stamina.





Drugs Education

Birches Primary School is a caring, responsible school with the children at the core of our activities. We recognise that we have an important role to play in enabling pupils to make informed and responsible decisions.

Drugs education forms part of our Personal Development & Mutual Understanding Programme (PDMU) which contributes to equipping pupils with the skills to manage their lives effectively and make responsible health decisions. 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.

Religious education

Non-denominational religious education will be available to all children. This programme follows the core curriculum as set out by the Department of Education for Northern Ireland. In addition to classroom work, pupils attend assembly on a weekly basis. This collective worship, led by the Principal, involves regular visits from local ministers, class and teacher participation as well as visits from local charities and Youth Groups. The annual RE Inspection visit takes place in the Summer Term. Parents who wish to withdraw their children from formal Religious Education should contact the Principal and alternative provision will be made for them.



Using ICT

Birches Primary School places a great emphasis on the acquisition of ICT skills. ICT is used throughout all subjects of the curriculum. Pupils are provided with the opportunities to explore, express, exchange, evaluate and exhibit. It is very important that our children are ICT literate; accordingly, we have invested financially in ensuring modern technology and software programmes are available to all our pupils. In all year groups teachers teach using integrated technology and pupils are required to complete ICT competency tasks.



Shared Education

Our Shared Education partnership is with St. Mary's Primary School, Maghery. Our programme involves building relationships with staff and pupils throughout the school and building community connections in the area. Children take part in a range of shared activities.





Assessment

At Birches Primary School each child's progress will be monitored on a regular basis, which provides the class teacher with information to plan for the needs of the children within his/her class. We use a range of assessment tools such as class tests, teacher observations, standardised tests, statutory assessments in communication, using mathematics and using ICT. It is our primary objective to continue to raise standards, with the main focus on high quality teaching and learning.

Parents will be informed of their children's progress by:

- An annual written report on each child's progress.
- A Parent Teacher Interview at which parents and the class teacher will have the opportunity to discuss their child's progress.
- Parents are encouraged to speak with their child's teacher, throughout the year, if they have any concerns.

Queries Regarding the Curriculum

If parents consider that the curriculum provision is not satisfactory, they can express their concern in the following stages.

In the vast majority of cases the problem is solved at stage one or two.

- Stage 1 Contact class teacher with Principal's consent
- Stage 2 Contact Principal
- Stage 3 Contact Chairperson of the Board of Governors (in writing)
- Stage 4 Contact the Office of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (in writing)

Special Educational Needs

Each child is important to us at Birches Primary School and we recognise that every child has individual abilities and needs. Teachers will continually monitor progress and if they find that a child is experiencing difficulties in coping with class work, they will refer that child to the teacher responsible for Special Needs (SENCO). Together they will assess the child's difficulties and additional help and support may be provided if necessary. An Individual Education Plan (IEP) / Personal Learning Plan (PLP) will be drawn up, monitored, and reviewed.

Throughout the year children may also receive additional learning support for literacy and numeracy when appropriate.

Close liaison is maintained between the school and various external agencies. Parents who have concerns about their child should make an appointment to speak with the class teacher, the SENCO or the Principal.

Extra-Curricular Activities

Birches Primary School offers a wide range of extra-curricular activities. We believe it offers a very valuable dimension to the education of the children attending the school. In addition to teaching staff, the school uses outside coaches to promote development in a wide range of sports.

P1 – P7 are offered a range of activities including:

- Tennis
- Cycling Proficiency
- Gardening
- Fitness
- STEM
- Dance
- Music and Drama
- Film Club
- Mini-Rugby
- Multisports
- Netball
- Athletics
- ICT Club
- Bible Club
- Soccer Stars
- Hockey
- Basketball

Pupil Voice

Eco Team

Our Eco Team is made up of pupils from P4 to P7. Children complete and application form at the beginning of the school year. The team meet regularly throughout the year to discuss environmental issues around the school. They are continuing their hard work in school to ensure that we are a sustainable school and continue to make efforts to improve our local and global environment.



Playtime Team

Our Playtime team consists of representatives from P3 to P7. These children have successfully applied for grants to brighten up their playground and have attractive markings for games, picnic benches and flower planters.



Pastoral Care

At Birches Primary School, we aim to provide a happy, caring, safe and supportive environment where each child is valued for his or her unique talents and abilities and where each child can learn and develop to his/her full potential. Each class teacher will look after the pastoral needs of their class.



The class teacher will attempt to resolve the worries of new pupils and to relieve their anxieties. The Principal will be grateful for information about any difficult home circumstances which may cause anxiety or stress. Pastoral Care permeates all aspects of school life. This ensures that pupils experience a caring secure school ethos together with effective working relationships at all levels.



It is important that school has up to date contact information. Please inform us immediately of changes in addresses, telephone numbers and carers' names to ensure that we can care for your child effectively.

Child Protection / Safeguarding

We understand that we have a primary responsibility for the care, welfare and safety of the pupils in our charge. This charge is taken very seriously and we always carry out this duty as effectively as possible. We may on occasion need to discuss matters with other agencies but it is always in the best interests of your child.

All child protection concerns and referrals are handled sensitively, professionally and in ways which support the needs of the child.

All staff in the school are Access NI checked and have child protection training.

The Staff and Governors responsible for Child Protection

The Principal: Mrs PV Watson

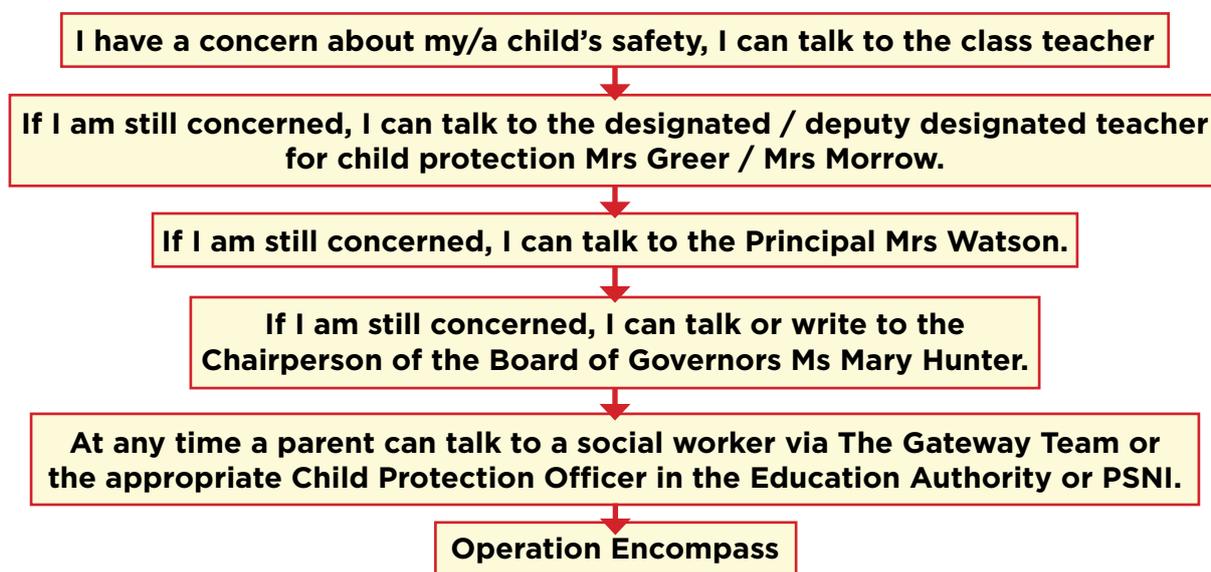
The Designated Teacher for Child Protection: Mrs J Greer

The Deputy Designated Teachers for Child Protection:

Mrs C Morrow, Mrs C Dunlop, Mrs R Patterson

Designated Governor for Child Protection: Mrs S Quin

The flow diagram below outlines the procedure for any parent who wish to highlight a concern.



Anti-Bullying

We take a proactive approach to bullying. Bullying and its effects are explained through Circle time, Assemblies and in a wide variety of ways.

Positive Behaviour and Citizenship

An atmosphere conducive to learning can only take place where there is good discipline. We adopt a positive approach to discipline and reward children for good progress, effort, honesty and appropriate social behaviour. This will also help to promote self-esteem and confidence. It is very important that children show courtesy and respect for all people. We expect a high standard of behaviour from our pupils and at all times encourage them to behave in a polite and mannerly way. Parental support and co-operation is most important in maintaining such a standard. We have effective whole school anti-bullying procedures.

Healthy Break 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.

Birches Primary School is a health promoting school and encourages children to bring a healthy break including fruit, vegetables, cheese, pancake or bread and butter.



Foundation Stage Snack

A healthy snack is provided for children in P1 and P2 for a charge of £2.00 per week.

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'. A menu detailing the content of school meals for the term ahead is available on the school website.

Packed Lunches

Children eat their packed lunch in the dining hall. Lunch should be packed in a named lunch box and left on the trolleys in the cloakroom. 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.

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.



Entering and Leaving the School Premises

Parents collecting and leaving children to school should observe the following guidelines:

Car Park

- The first car park is to be used by parents and visitors to school.
- Always use the pedestrian pathways provided.
- Disabled spaces should be used by badge holders only.

Collecting Children after school

- Children will be brought to the front entrance where they will be passed over to the person collecting them by a member of staff.
- A staggered home-time is in operation to ease traffic congestion.
- Doors are locked during school hours. Any parent wishing to collect a child from school during school hours should report to the school office.



Charging and Remissions Policy

Education at Birches Primary School is provided free of charge for all lessons and activities connected with the child's entitlement to the school's formal curriculum. The school will appeal to parents from time to time for voluntary donations but it is stressed that no child will be disadvantaged in any way if parents choose not to make a contribution. The school will charge for optional extras, which are not connected with the school's formal curriculum such as day trips. Charges will be made for these but it is stressed that failure to participate will not affect a child's performance at school. Written parental consent will be required before a child participates in school trips. The school will also charge for individual tuition / sports coaching taken by music tutors or sports coaches. A contribution will also be requested towards swimming and transport.

Medical details / issues

It is important that parents keep the school informed of any medical details relating to their child. This includes use of inhalers, allergies, dietary needs, speech therapy, occupational therapy, along with any other illness about which it is important we have information. All medical conditions and resulting requirements are documented and displayed where necessary.

No child will be allowed to bring medicines to school without prior arrangements and procedures being put in place using the administration of medicine form (available in school or on the website).

School Health

Children in primary one will undergo a medical screening with the School Nurse during their first year at school. Follow-up medicals and sight tests are also carried out for some P2 - P7 children. Parents will be sent details about these medicals and may be invited to be present. The flu vaccination is also administered to all pupils by the Health Trust each year.

School Information

The school hours are as follows:

School opens	8.30am
P1	8.40am - 1.20pm
P2	8.40am - 1.30pm
P3	8.40am - 1.45pm - Tuesdays and Wednesdays 8.40am - 2.30pm - Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays
P4 - P7	8.40am - 2.35pm

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.

School Uniform Foundation Stage (P1 and P2)

School Uniform	PE Uniform
Term 1 and Term 2	
Slim leg sweatpants / jogging bottoms	(to be kept in school in a drawstring bag)
White Polo shirt	Black plimsoles
Royal blue school sweatshirt / hoodie	Black shorts
Trainers with velcro fastening (no laces)	
Wellie boots	
Summer Uniform - third term	
Blue checked summer dress (optional) / Grey school shorts (optional)	

School Uniform P3 - P7

Girls Uniform	Boys Uniform	PE Uniform
Grey skirt / pinafore	Grey trousers	White Polo Shirt
Royal blue school sweatshirt/hoodie	Royal blue school sweatshirt/hoodie	Black shorts
White polo shirt	White polo shirt	Black plimsoles
Black shoes (with low heel for safety reasons)	Black shoes	
Summer Uniform - third term		
Blue Checked summer dress (optional)	Grey school shorts (optional)	

- All children will need the above PE kit
(*This can be kept in school in a draw string bag*).
- 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 and Robert Davidson School Wear, Portadown.

All items of clothing should be labelled clearly with the child's name.

Jewellery

As the safety of your child is our main concern the only items of jewellery that children may wear are small plain studs in the lobe of their ears. If studs are worn, the pupils should be able to remove and replace them themselves for any physical activity.

Watches (not smart watches or watches with a recording device) may be worn. For security and practical reasons, on P.E. and swimming days we request that no jewellery is worn.

Mobile Phone and Electronic Devices

Under our school policy, mobile phones and electronic devices are not permitted in school.



Links With Parents and The Community

We value our school staff and pupils, our parents and our neighbouring community. We hold strong links with local churches and businesses and 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
- 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 and raise valuable funds for our pupils and school. You, as a parent, are very welcome to assist with the PTA! We welcome your suggestions and support.

Charities

Birches Primary School has a reputation for generosity and for caring about those who are less fortunate. A number of charities are supported each year which have included the RAF Wings Appeal, the Poppy Appeal, the British Heart Foundation and the Shoe Box Appeal. Money is raised through non-uniform days and other collections and activities.

Website

www.birchesps.com

Please check our school website for up to date information.

The information in this booklet is correct at the time of publication. However, it cannot be assumed that changes will not occur during the course of the year.



Birches Primary School



Principal: Mrs PV Watson

Chairperson of the Board of Governors:
Ms M Hunter

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