

Sycamore Lane Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111193
Local Authority	Warrington
Inspection number	356877
Inspection dates	23–24 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Mike McLachlan

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	297
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Steve Tottie
Headteacher	Mrs Joanne Hewson
Date of previous school inspection	14 April 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Twenty-five lessons were observed and 13 teachers seen. Meetings were held with parents and carers, groups of pupils, members of the governing body and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at safeguarding procedures and documents and school policies and development plans. Pupils' work, school assessment records and examples of pupils' test papers were examined. The responses to the pupils' questionnaire and 100 parental questionnaires were also scrutinised.

- The progress made by pupils in mathematics across the school and the attainment of pupils, particularly at the higher levels in English and mathematics, to ascertain if there has been sufficient improvement compared to last year.
- The quality of teaching, particularly of English and mathematics, and the use of target-setting and of tracking pupils' progress to see if the school provides sufficient challenge for pupils of all abilities.
- The changes introduced since the last inspection to the care and guidance systems and to test the school's assertion that they are now good.
- The systems for developing leadership and management in the school, by involving all staff in the 'Quality Improvement Focus Teams' and the impact this is having on improving the curriculum and the quality of pupils' learning.

Information about the school

This is a larger-than-average size primary school. The number on roll has fallen since the last inspection and the school is in the process of preparing for a move to a new building based on one form entry. The vast majority of pupils are of White British origin. There are small numbers of pupils from minority ethnic groups with very few pupils who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average but has increased since the last inspection. The number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is average. The school gained the International Schools Award (Gold), Healthy School status 2009, Activemark Award 2009 and the Artsmark Gold for the third time.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Sycamore Lane Primary School provides a satisfactory education. It has improved the provision for care, guidance and support since the last inspection. The rigorous and detailed systems in place and the way in which the school monitors, evaluates and secures pupils' safety are exemplary and held in high regard by pupils and their parents and carers. High-level expertise in health and safety within the governing body significantly supports the school in securing these very high standards. Pupils' attainment is broadly average. This represents satisfactory progress given that children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with broadly expected skills. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress and some with specific difficulties make good progress because of the good care and support they receive. Overall achievement is satisfactory but improving. Work seen in Years 5 and 6, particularly at the higher levels, shows substantial improvement compared to previous years. By the time pupils leave Year 6 they are confident and mature and have a very positive attitude to work. Behaviour is good and attendance is above average. Pupils say they enjoy all the school offers and this is fully supported by their parents and carers.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, although there are examples of good and outstanding practice which lead to very good and effective learning. In these lessons, pupils are enthusiastic and excited by what they have to do and bring a very mature and persistent attitude to their work. These good examples are offset by too much satisfactory teaching lower down the school where pupils are insufficiently challenged to work for themselves.

The curriculum is satisfactory rather than good overall, due to shortcomings in the opportunities for continuous provision and use of the outdoor areas in the Early Years Foundation Stage and a lack of opportunity for experimental work in science. There are a number of good features, particularly in the way in which the school is developing creativity across the curriculum and in the improvements made to the pupils' experience in English and mathematics. Extra-curricular activities, visits and visitors promote pupils' personal development well. Care, guidance and support are good. There are good links with a wide range of agencies so that vulnerable pupils are very well supported.

Leadership, while satisfactory overall, is improving. This is evident in the strength of the systems introduced to hold all to account, to raise aspirations and share leadership responsibility through the school's 'Quality Improvement Focus Teams'. Self-evaluation is thorough and accurate. Most issues identified in the last inspection report have been addressed, although the outdoor provision is not yet fully utilised in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The 'Quality Teams' are at a relatively early stage in development. While these are improving, they have not yet fully developed their capacity to ensure consistency in the quality of learning and teaching in their areas across all year groups in

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the school. Consequently, the school is judged to have a satisfactory capacity to sustain improvement.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Within the next twelve months:
- Embed the improvements seen in English and mathematics in Years 5 and 6 across all subjects and year groups by:
 - improving the quality of teaching in each key stage so that it is consistently in line with the best in the school
 - ensuring that lessons are planned so that all pupils are actively involved throughout the lesson
 - ensuring the 'Quality Improvement Focus Teams' take greater responsibility for monitoring the impact of the quality of learning and teaching on pupils' attainment and progress.
- Improve attainment in science across the school by:
 - ensuring that pupils have frequent and regular opportunities to conduct experiments for themselves
 - improving the overall presentation of pupils' work.
- Improve children's attainment in communication, language and literacy and in their mathematical development, and enhance the quality of teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - reviewing the way in which lessons are planned and how the accommodation is organised and equipped, so that children have more access to continuous play and outdoor activities throughout the morning and afternoon sessions
 - extending the opportunities provided by the outdoor provision so that children can be involved in more activities to support their mathematical and creative development.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Learning across the school is satisfactory although there are examples of high-quality learning, particularly in English and mathematics in upper Key Stage 2 and across the school in the creative curriculum. Where learning is good, activities set and teachers' questions challenge and inspire pupils to think for themselves, to be creative and to work at a pace which stretches them throughout the lesson. For example, in a Year 5 history lesson, pupils were excitedly working in groups trying to place pictures of objects and events from 1948 to the present day on large date lines. They were very effectively using good historical skills of evidence and analysis to place objects they did not know, by the age of the photograph or their links to other known events. However, the quality of learning overall is no better than satisfactory because there are too many lessons in which the work set is not in context, has no practical aspect or is dominated by the teacher

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doing too much of the work so, as the pupils said, 'There is not enough time for us to do the work.'

Attainment is broadly average and pupils' progress satisfactory given their starting points. Past performance, while consistently good in English, has been too variable in mathematics. Last year, for example, pupils did not make the progress expected in this subject. There is evidence that the changes made to the way in which lessons are planned are resulting in rising attainment in this subject. This is evident in the substantial proportion of pupils now securely achieving Level 5 in mathematics in Year 6. Overall, pupils' achievement, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language, is satisfactory. There is strong evidence of an improving picture although these improvements are not yet fully embedded across all other year groups.

Pupils' personal development is a strength of the school. Pupils are mature, self-assured and very confident youngsters. They say they feel very safe and well prepared to move on to the next stage of their education. They enjoy their time at school as evidenced by their good behaviour, above average attendance and their good contribution through their many activities in the school and the wider community. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good as a result of a broad range of curricular and extra-curricular experiences.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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How effective is the provision?

Teaching and the use of assessment to support learning are satisfactory. There are good signs of improvement in both aspects, particularly in English and mathematics and in the teaching of the well-planned creative curriculum. In the best lessons, rich activities and challenging tasks lead to some very imaginative and high-level responses. For example, in a Year 6 lesson, in response to a picture showing a potential shipwreck, a pupil wrote, 'The ominous sea toyed with the boat bullying it mercilessly.' and another suggested, 'Lightning flashed like an electric spark running down an invisible power line.' However, there is too much teaching across the school where pupils remain passive in their learning and where the teacher takes too long in setting the scene. As a result pupils' progress is limited. In the main, work is marked regularly and pupils have a good understanding of their targets and what they specifically have to do to improve.

The curriculum is satisfactory. A rich extra-curricular programme supports pupils' good spiritual and cultural development. The creative curriculum, together with the recent improvements in mathematics and English and in the development of themed-based areas of study, have all had a significant impact on pupils' attainment, progress and enjoyment. However, these improvements are not yet consistently in place across all year groups. There are some weaknesses in science provision where pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to undertake experiments by themselves and the teachers do not have high enough expectations of pupils' work.

Overall, the quality of care, guidance and support is good. Some elements are outstanding, particularly the way in which the school goes the 'extra mile' to support vulnerable families. The good relationships with a wide range of outside agencies to support children and their families have made a significant contribution to the good progress pupils make in their personal and social development and to their good attendance. Individual pupils' needs are identified at weekly staff meetings so that intervention is quickly initiated when needed. Parents and carers speak highly of this aspect of the school's provision. The transition arrangements into the school or on to secondary education are good.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher's systematic approach to monitoring and evaluating the school's work, in setting challenging targets and tracking pupils' progress has raised expectations. The creation of teams of staff to lead school improvement ensures that all feel part of this

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drive for improvement and is spreading accountability. This approach is beginning to make a difference to the quality of the curriculum and the challenge seen in the best teaching. This is particularly evident in the creative curriculum and the greater focus on developing basic skills particularly in English and in mathematics. However, inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and weaknesses in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in the science curriculum remain because the skills needed by members of the focus teams to monitor the impact of their work are still developing. This is recognised by the school and plans are in hand to ensure that these groups are able to monitor more rigorously.

Consequently, leadership at present is satisfactory but showing signs of improvement. The impact of the work of the relatively new governing body is satisfactory. Members of the governing body have a wide range of relevant expertise and a good action plan in place to improve their current satisfactory capacity to support and challenge the school.

The systems for ensuring safeguarding are outstanding. This is because the school has very systematic and very well monitored systems in place to ensure pupils and staff are safe. Training for staff on safer recruitment and child protection, and for pupils, for example, on internet safety, is frequent and detailed. Significantly, there is also a high level of governing body expertise in health and safety, bringing an external perspective which challenges the school to sustain these very high standards.

The school only satisfactorily promotes equal opportunities because, although personal development outcomes are good, learning and progress outcomes are currently no better than satisfactory. The school effectively promotes community cohesion particularly through its work in the local community and through its links with other schools at home and abroad. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

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Early Years Foundation Stage

Children enter school from a very wide range of settings. The school works well to make this transition as smooth as possible. Children make satisfactory progress, so by the end of the Reception Year, they show average skills in communication, language and literacy and in their mathematical development. Their personal, social and emotional development is good. Children are happy, play well together and have a positive attitude to learning. They share well and make sensible choices about their health and safety. Children behave well, responding to the positive relationships and caring attitude of the staff.

Overall provision is satisfactory. Adults display an effective understanding of individual children's learning and development needs. They are caring and attentive and build positive relationships which support children in becoming independent. Staff work well with a range of agencies in order to keep pupils safe and meet their individual needs. As a result care, guidance and support for children are good. Teaching and the curricular opportunities provided are satisfactory overall. While activities within the classroom areas are, in the main, planned effectively to promote children's learning, there are insufficient opportunities for free choice of continuous outdoor activity, which limits children's exploratory play. In addition, activities available in the outdoor areas do not sufficiently support children's mathematical and creative development. Consequently, children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make satisfactory rather than good progress.

Leadership, currently in a transition stage, is satisfactory. A number of improvements have been made, particularly in assessing and tracking children's progress and in the access to outdoor provision. Whole-school plans are in hand to improving the quality of teaching and learning. However, these have been focussed at the upper school and are not yet sufficiently well targeted in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers have a very positive view of the school as shown by their responses to the questionnaire. All who responded felt their children were happy in school, were safe and that the school helped their children have a healthy lifestyle. Inspectors judge that pupils, while knowing a great deal about healthy living do not always put this into practice, so judge the outcomes to be currently satisfactory. Virtually all parents and carers were satisfied with teaching, the information they received and were happy with what the school provided. A small number of parents and carers expressed concerns over the way

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in which behaviour was managed. Inspectors found behaviour in the school both in class and in social areas to be good.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Sycamore Lane Community Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 102 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 297 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	70	69	29	28	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	68	67	32	31	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	63	62	35	34	2	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	62	61	33	32	4	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	67	66	30	29	2	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	64	63	32	31	4	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	59	58	40	39	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	50	49	39	38	3	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	55	54	39	38	3	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	51	50	36	35	11	11	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	46	45	45	44	5	5	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	46	45	44	43	4	4	4	4
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	66	65	28	27	3	3	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



27 February 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Sycamore Lane Community Primary School, Warrington, WA5 1LA

Thank you for the way you made us feel so welcome when we inspected your school recently. We were impressed by your friendliness and the way you were prepared to talk to us about how much you enjoy coming to school. Your school provides you with a satisfactory education. This is because the changes made to setting your challenging targets and tracking how well you are doing in meeting them, and the drive to raise attainment in English and mathematics are all now making a difference. Although your attainment and progress are satisfactory they are improving quickly. We were impressed with the quality of work seen in Years 5 and 6, a credit to yourselves for your hard work and to the teachers for what they ask you to do. We think you are well cared for and that your school has outstanding systems in place to make sure you feel safe. It was clear from your and your parents' and carers' questionnaires that you feel the same. You are well behaved and very grown up.

We found that teaching is satisfactory overall although there is some that is good and some outstanding. The good teaching is not consistent in all your subjects or in all year groups and sometimes you have to listen for too long, so you do not have enough time to do your independent work. The curriculum is satisfactory. You are given a wide range of activities and some interesting ways of learning, for example, your 'Super Days', which you really enjoy. However, we do not think you have enough opportunities to do experiments in science and in the Reception class, we found that children need to have more opportunities to work outside on creative and mathematical activities throughout the day.

Your headteacher and staff have high ambitions and good plans to make your school even better. They have set up working groups to make this happen. We think it would be helpful if these groups now concentrated on ensuring that the best teaching and learning is spread across the whole school.

We wish you every success in your efforts in helping your school to become an even better place in which to work and play.

Yours sincerely

Mike McLachlan

Lead inspector

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