

Alumwell Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104143
Local Authority	Walsall
Inspection number	355531
Inspection dates	11–12 November 2010
Reporting inspector	David Carrington

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	265
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Price
Headteacher	Christine Scott
Date of previous school inspection	5 December 2007
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Age group	4–7
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They observed 14 lessons led by 10 teachers. Meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, senior leaders and members of the governing body. The inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at school planning, assessment data, samples of pupils' work, the school's monitoring of the quality of teaching and a number of policy documents. The team received 66 questionnaires from parents and carers and also evaluated those from school staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- How far pupils' good progress is being maintained and attainment raised in all subjects, including writing and information and communication technology.
- Whether leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage is building on past successes and strengthening provision and children's progress.
- The degree to which the promotion of community cohesion is as strong with groups elsewhere in the United Kingdom and overseas as it is with the local community.
- The successes of the assessment to support learning system in helping pupils accelerate their progress.

Information about the school

Alumwell Infant School is larger than most other infant schools. Over half the pupils speak English as an additional language. Between them, they speak 20 different languages, with Urdu, Mirpuri and Punjabi being the most common. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is about twice the national average. A below average proportion have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Many of these pupils have some form of learning or behavioural, social and emotional difficulty. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in the three Reception classes. Some of these children attend the before- and after-school clubs and holiday provision which are not managed by the school. These settings were inspected separately.

The school has Investors in People and Healthy Schools status and has been awarded the Activemark.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Alumwell Infant School is a good school. It is improving well and has a number of outstanding features which include pupils' behaviour, the excellent quality of care, guidance and support, and the robust safeguarding systems. The school benefits from the very capable direction of the headteacher and a team of staff. Along with members of the governing body, they hold high expectations and work successfully to improve what they do. The evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses is thorough, improvement planning is detailed and well focused on key matters, and checks to ensure pupils are progressing as well as possible are regular and reliable. The school has good capacity to maintain its improvement.

Children start Reception with levels of skills and knowledge that are below those expected for their age. They make good progress in Reception and through Years 1 and 2. By the time they leave for junior school their attainment is average. The school has closed the former gap in attainment between its pupils and others across the country. This year, pupils' books show evidence of some above average attainment in writing and mathematics. Pupils' achievement in information and communication technology (ICT) has been improved and is now good.

Pupils have an outstanding understanding of how to keep safe and healthy. They enjoy school immensely and are keen to learn. They are friendly, helpful and sensible. They work together well and are proud to be part of the school community. Pupils know right from wrong and act responsibly towards others. They attend regularly. Usually, absence is due to genuine illnesses typical of this age group and there is very little persistent absence.

Lessons are of good quality. There are outstanding features of teaching including the expectations held of pupils and the brisk pace of working. In less-well-taught lessons, teachers talk for too long which does not enable pupils to develop independence and self-reliance in their work. Nevertheless, the pupils work well in lessons and much is completed in their books each day. The good curriculum benefits from the excellent partnerships the school has built with outside groups including the local authority and other schools. These partnerships have also supported the first-rate care given to vulnerable pupils and those with barriers to learning.

School leaders are determined to help the school move from good to outstanding. They recognise that part of this process will involve the improvement of the way community cohesion is promoted. This is good but not yet outstanding. Pupils have some strong and effective links with other children locally and in other parts of the United Kingdom. They do not develop the same awareness of children in other parts of the world. The school has formed a good partnership with parents and carers which is shown in their very positive responses to the inspection questionnaire. Parents and carers agree that the school

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enables all their children to achieve well. It promotes equality of opportunity most successfully.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all pupils develop independence and self-reliance in learning by:
 - making sure teachers do not talk for too long in lessons
 - increasing the opportunities for pupils to talk together about their learning
 - giving them time to record their thoughts about their learning in their books.
- Increase pupils' opportunities to learn about children's lives, cultures and beliefs in other parts of the world.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils make good progress in the vast majority of their lessons. Where progress slackens it is due to long periods when they have to listen rather than work actively and independently. Their enthusiasm for learning is very obvious in lessons. In a Year 1 mathematics lesson a lower attaining group worked with great enjoyment as they used balances for the first time to check the weight of small objects. They discovered how the balance moved to show the heavier item and then tried successfully to put the objects in order of weight. They talked constantly of what they were doing and seeing and the teacher quizzed them effectively about key knowledge and skills. In this lesson the practical nature of the work helped the pupils make good progress.

Pupils' attainment in writing has been improved well and is now average. Year 2 books show the teachers' firm focus not just on key writing skills but also the expressiveness of writing. Here, the pupils make good progress because there is regular sharing of targets for learning, often at the front of the book, and teachers mark the work to show how well they are being achieved. The pupils know exactly how well they are learning and what are the next steps to take. There are, as yet, not many opportunities for the pupils to record their own thoughts in their books about their learning.

The school is a settled, quiet place of work and play. The pupils enjoy each other's company greatly. They are also firm friends with the staff. Relationships are first-rate. Because they get on so well together there is hardly any argument, falling out or bullying. In fact, the pupils are insistent that there is no bullying at all. The very many different minority ethnic groups work and play together in great harmony. The pupils want to find out about their friends' beliefs and culture. A Year 2 class particularly enjoyed finding out about the Muslim pupils' celebration of Eid ul Adha and were intrigued to discover it is celebrated 'just like Christmas'. This lesson contributed well to their good spiritual and cultural development.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	3
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

How effective is the provision?

Teachers are skilful at linking subjects together to enable pupils to develop good skills and knowledge across the curriculum. For example, in a well-taught Year 2 art lesson the pupils learned much about texture by relating their scientific knowledge of animal camouflage to their own patterns. They were also expected to use the correct technical vocabulary and to speak in complete sentences when they replied to questions. This aided their use of good English. In addition, their achievement was increased by the use of ICT to show clear visual images of a range of animals.

The school has developed a curriculum that effectively ensures pupils achieve equally successfully in different subjects. The range of out of school activities is much enhanced by the partnerships with other schools and groups locally. The take-up of these activities is high, especially sport and dance which are a central part of the Healthy School award. There is very firm and equally effective emphasis on pupils' personal, social, health and emotional development. School leaders are working currently to create greater opportunities within the curriculum to promote pupils' independence and collaborative skills and creativity in learning.

Pupils who speak English as an additional language benefit from very effective support to help them become fluent and expressive users of their new language. A strength here is the use of bilingual support which ensures all pupils understand the nature of their work and what is expected of them. Such bilingual support is used sparingly and pupils soon

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adjust to instruction in English. Pupils learning to speak English as an additional language make good progress and by the end of Year 2 their attainment is often above that of similar pupils in other schools, including in reading and writing. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities also make good progress. Their work is planned in small steps and teaching assistants modify their tasks so that skills and knowledge are built in a carefully planned sequence. The effective use of assessment to support learning is clearly evident in the support provided for both of these groups of pupils.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

School development planning is well focused on the essential areas for improvement. Pupils' progress is at the centre of all improvement priorities and is used as the key indicator of the quality of provision, particularly teaching, and the school's overall effectiveness. The systems of assessing achievement, setting targets for learning, testing they have been met and intervening to overcome any slower progress are thorough and reliable. Senior leaders are well involved in evaluating the school's performance and are influential in its improvement, particularly the strengthening of teaching quality. The quest for increased achievement and even greater effectiveness of provision is central to their work. This is underlined by the very marked equality of opportunity provided for every pupil.

Leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage is on a caretaking basis while awaiting the new coordinator for the phase. A number of improvement areas, including more effective assessment, have been identified for the new coordinator to pursue. The existing arrangements have been successful in maintaining the good features of the stage.

The governing body is well informed about strengths and weaknesses, and probes to ensure decisions are the right ones to support increased progress among the pupils. Members of the governing body use essential data increasingly well to identify whether progress is good enough. They ensure the school meets its statutory responsibilities, including the steadfast procedures for the safeguarding of pupils and the elimination of any form of discrimination. At present they are working to broaden the promotion of community cohesion by extending the school's links with others overseas. They have already improved the school's partnerships with other schools in the United Kingdom effectively.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

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

Early Years Foundation Stage

Provision has been improved well and is now good. The children in Reception soon settle to their work and play, and very happily come to school. The work indoors and out is well planned to enable children to make choices and to discover much about the world around them. One group of children very much enjoyed comparing what they could see in the dark and what they could see in the light outside. There was a strong sense of adventure as they entered the darkened Wendy house. They talked enthusiastically of the dark and the difference their lit torches made. Outside they looked for the sun among the clouds because they knew it was the source of the light. When asked, nearly everyone wanted to go back into the dark, such had been the adventure. At present, the work outside is sometimes limited because of the lack of overhead shelter to enable the children to work in all weathers.

Senior leaders have ensured that effective provision in Reception has been maintained while waiting for the new Early Years Foundation Stage leader to start in school. The children's good progress is strong evidence for the effectiveness of leadership. The children build the essential skills and knowledge necessary for their age and nearly all reach their targets in all six areas of learning by the time they join Year 1. This includes their communication, language and literacy, and emotional development, which are particularly weak when children start school. The very effective partnership with parents and carers contributes much to children's progress while in Reception. It is also central to their welfare, which is extremely well promoted.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers hold extremely positive views of the school. Very unusually, no-one wrote about concerns when completing the questionnaire. From the placing of their ticks on the sheet a few are concerned about the progress their children are making. However, there is very firm evidence that all pupils make good progress while at Alumwell Infant School. The judgements of the inspection are a very close match with the views of the parents and carers.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Alumwell Infant 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.

Inspection team received 66 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 265 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	48	73	18	27	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	43	65	23	35	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	43	65	23	35	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	38	58	24	36	3	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	46	70	19	29	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	41	62	23	35	1	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	39	59	27	41	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)	36	55	24	36	1	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	36	55	28	42	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	37	56	27	41	2	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	34	52	29	44	2	3	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	34	52	27	41	2	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	41	62	24	36	0	0	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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 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. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

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.



12 November 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Alumwell Infant School, Walsall WS2 9UP

Thank you for the welcome you gave us when we visited you recently. We enjoyed our time with you because you were friendly and helpful. We think your school is a good one. It has a lot of strengths.

- You make good progress and learn well.
- You are well taught which helps you reach the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Children in Reception enjoy their time in school and work and play happily together.
- Your behaviour is excellent.
- You get on very well together and look after each other.
- Your teachers make sure you are safe and healthy.
- Your headteacher and other school leaders expect you to do well and they make sure that you do.

We think there are two things for your teachers to improve now.

- You could be given more chances to decide the best way to learn new things.
- Your school could develop better links with children in other parts of the world.

We know you have a lot of fun in school. We saw that when you were playing all the musical instruments in the playground. We think you will enjoy helping your teachers make these improvements. To start you could tell them your ideas for what makes the most interesting and enjoyable lessons.

Yours sincerely

David Carrington

Lead inspector

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