

Blanford Mere Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	103792
Local authority	Dudley
Inspection number	376965
Inspection dates	1–2 February 2012
Lead inspector	Roy Bowers HMI

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	255
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Allan Weaver
Headteacher	Nikki Miller
Date of previous school inspection	13 November 2008
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

Inspection team

Roy Bowers

Her Majesty's Inspector

Clare Saunders

Additional inspector

Ruth McGill

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 19 lessons taught by 13 teachers. They held meetings with representatives of the governing body, groups of pupils and staff. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at the school's plans for improvement, assessment information, lesson plans, the school's monitoring information, school policies and 102 questionnaires from parents and carers.

Information about the school

This is an average sized primary school. The proportions of pupils with disabilities and those with special educational needs are below average and include pupils with moderate learning difficulties, speech, language and communication needs and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. Almost all pupils are White British. A few are of minority ethnic heritage. There are no pupils who speak English as an additional language. The school meets the government's current floor standard, which are the minimum expectations set for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics. The school has achieved several awards including Healthy Schools status and the International Schools award.

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	4
Achievement of pupils	4
Quality of teaching	4
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	4

Key findings

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

- This is not a satisfactory school because since the last inspection initiatives to raise pupils' attainment in mathematics, accelerate their overall progress and improve the quality of teaching in Key Stage 2 have been unsuccessful. By the end of Key Stage 2, pupils' attainment in mathematics is consistently below average and their progress through the key stage is slow. Pupils' progress in English in Key Stage 2 is satisfactory.
- Pupils achieve well in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. However, the progress of some of the more-able pupils in Key Stage 1 is slower than that of others.
- Teaching is inadequate in Key Stage 2. The pace of learning is often slow and teachers fail to use assessment information rigorously enough to plan work that meets pupils' needs. In many lessons, pupils are not guided well enough through small learning steps. Teachers do not check pupils' understanding regularly enough, addressing any misconceptions or ensuring that pupils understand how to improve their work. In contrast, teaching is good in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1.
- Pupils say that they enjoy coming to school and feel safe. They are polite and well-mannered. Most pupils behave well and show very positive attitudes to their learning. However, in some lessons teachers talk for too long, pupils become inattentive and restless and, very occasionally, disrupt the learning of others.
- All leaders carry out a full range of monitoring and evaluation activities.

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However, they do not rigorously check how effectively pupils at all levels of attainment are challenged in lessons. The plans for improvement are not focused sharply enough on improving pupils' achievement, do not have measurable outcomes and their effectiveness is not monitored regularly. The governing body is very supportive of the school but does not take a sufficiently active role in monitoring and evaluating pupils' achievement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the more-able pupils in Key Stage 1 and all pupils in Key Stage 2 make good progress, particularly in mathematics in the latter key stage, by improving the quality of teaching so that:
 - teachers use assessment information more rigorously and as a consequence work set meets pupils' needs and they are guided carefully through small learning steps
 - during lessons, teachers check regularly on pupils' learning, address any misconceptions, and ensure that pupils understand how to improve their work
 - the pace of learning in lessons is improved and teachers do not talk for too long
 - teachers' marking consistently provides pupils with clear and focused points for improvement
 - pupils are provided with more opportunities to practise and apply their academic skills, especially in numeracy, across the curriculum.

- Strengthen the capacity for sustained improvement by ensuring that:
 - leaders rigorously check how effectively pupils of all levels of attainment are challenged in lessons
 - all plans for improvement are focused sharply on improving pupils' achievement, have measurable outcomes and the effectiveness of the plans is monitored regularly
 - the governing body plays a more active role in monitoring and evaluating pupils' achievement.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Although nearly all parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire felt that their children are making good progress. The inspection found that pupils' achievement is inadequate overall, mainly because of pupils' slow progress in mathematics in Key Stage 2.

Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills that are typical for their age. A wide-ranging curriculum, effective monitoring of children's progress and strong relationships between children and staff help ensure good learning. Parents

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and carers speak very positively about the way their children settle quickly into routines and say they are happy at school. Well planned activities help to stimulate their interest and actively promote their language skills. A good example of this seen by inspectors was when children moved their hands inside a bowl of ice cubes and talked about their feelings. Children's mathematical calculating skills are not as well developed, mainly because there are fewer opportunities for children to practise these skills, especially during child-initiated play.

Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 1 and, by the end of Year 2 their attainment is above average in reading, writing and mathematics. Lack of challenge for some more-able pupils means that a relatively small number attain the higher levels. In reading, mainly because of the regular and systematic programme which promotes knowledge and understanding of letters and sounds, pupils are able to work out the pronunciation of new and difficult words. However, pupils' comprehension skills are less well developed. Pupils say that they enjoy their reading and most read with confidence.

Following the decline in pupils' achievement in English at the end of Key Stage 2 which began just after the last inspection, a more structured approach to teaching literacy is having a positive impact. Pupils' attainment in Year 6 is currently just above average in reading and writing.

Despite the introduction of many initiatives, pupils' achievement in mathematics is inadequate. Pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 has remained consistently below average over recent years and pupils' progress is slow. In 2011, only two thirds of pupils who left at the end of Year 6 made the expected rate of progress in the subject over the key stage. Pupils' skills in calculation remain weak and many pupils continue to have difficulties in applying mathematical skills to problem-solving. Because pupils' achievement in mathematics in Key Stage 2 has declined since the last inspection, the achievement gap between the pupils in this school and those pupils in schools where attainment is higher has widened.

Pupils with disabilities, those with special educational needs and pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds make similar progress to others, and also underachieve in mathematics. Some receive guidance in lessons from teaching assistants and additional support through work in small groups. Some of the additional small-group support in English provides good challenge. However, in mathematics, some of the tasks given to pupils are not matched well enough to their needs and make little contribution to pupils' learning.

Quality of teaching

Overall the quality of teaching is inadequate. Most pupils and parents and carers feel that teaching is good. The inspection found that, although there is some good teaching, the teaching in Key Stage 2 does not challenge pupils well enough to raise achievement, especially in mathematics. It is not having sufficient sustained impact on pupils' learning, especially in mathematics.

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Relationships between teachers and pupils are respectful and caring. Pupils are eager to learn and, when engaged and interested and stimulated, respond well to the teachers' instructions. Although most pupils say that they enjoy learning, especially when they are actively involved and teachers do not talk for too long, a few say that many lessons are boring because they are given nothing exciting to do. This was not the case in one Year 6 English lesson, where the teaching engaged the pupils and their spiritual, moral and social development was promoted well through a debate about whether or not a captain should stay with a sinking ship. Pupils treated this task with great enjoyment and maturity, listened intently and reflected carefully upon each other's opinions. However, the effective teaching seen in this lesson is not reflective of the teaching generally evident in Key Stage 2.

In the Early Years Foundation Stage there is a good balance between child-initiated activities and those led by the teacher. Throughout the school, all teachers regularly mark pupils' books. Although there are some examples of good marking where teachers provide pupils with clear guidance on how to improve, it is inconsistent.

There has not been enough improvement in pupils' achievement in mathematics in Key Stage 2 because too much teaching is no better than satisfactory and some is inadequate. In lessons, work is often not matched well enough to pupils' needs, teachers fail to check on pupils' understanding and, consequently, do not move them on to the next small step in their learning. For example, in a small-group mathematics lesson, one pupil completed the task with no effort at all and said that she had a full understanding of the method of multiplication being taught even before the lesson started. Although additional work was given to occupy her time, she did not make gains in her learning throughout the lesson. Others in the group failed to learn because their progress and work were not assessed as the lesson proceeded and they were not guided through the small learning steps needed to clarify their understanding of the method of calculation being taught.

The recently reorganised curriculum offers pupils opportunities to engage actively in a range of subjects through first-hand experiences. It is beginning to help teachers provide more opportunities for pupils to practise and apply their skills, especially in mathematics, across the curriculum. However, these changes are not firmly established and opportunities to improve pupils' skills, such as calculating and problem-solving, are often not taken. In assemblies, pupils' spiritual and moral development is promoted well. Pupils sing hymns enthusiastically and are given good opportunities to reflect on many aspects of life.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils are keen to please the teachers and show respect and courtesy to each other. Pupils from different backgrounds play happily and get on well together. Pupils say that they feel safe and secure, and parents and carers agree. Strong links with external agencies help ensure that attendance is above average and pupils whose circumstances have made them vulnerable are cared for well.

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Nearly all parents and carers say that there is a good standard of behaviour in the school, but a few say that lessons are disrupted by bad behaviour and that the school does not deal effectively with cases of bullying. Pupils agree that there are very occasional instances of verbal bullying, but all pupils spoken to say that the school deals with them well and they would be very confident to talk to a teacher if they had a concern. One parent reported that a racist comment made to a pupil was dealt with very effectively by the school. In general, bullying of any kind is dealt with effectively. Although pupils behave well around school and in most lessons, pupils' learning is occasionally disrupted because of poor behaviour. In these instances, it is often because the pace of learning is too slow, teachers talk for too long and the work given to pupils does not meet their needs. Consequently, pupils become bored and restless.

Leadership and management

Monitoring of the schools work by senior leaders lacks rigour because they and the governing body have not accurately identified and tackled the root causes of the underachievement and weak teaching in Key Stage 2. Consequently, staff training has not been targeted to the most important priorities that focus on raising pupils' achievement. Lesson observations and checks on pupils' work in books are too focused on the performance of the teacher rather than the challenge being offered in lessons to raise attainment and improve the quality of learning. Plans for improvement do not focus sharply enough on raising achievement and do not have any measurable outcomes for the school to judge the impact of teaching on pupils' attainment and progress. This means that deficiencies in teaching, especially in mathematics, have not been identified or addressed and leaders cannot evaluate the success or otherwise of their actions.

The governing body is committed to the school and some governors visit regularly and help at events such as the residential visit. However, the governing body does not take an active enough role in monitoring and evaluating pupils' achievement. The general lack of rigour in monitoring and evaluating educational practice in lessons that will have a sustained impact on pupils' outcomes means that the school has inadequate capacity to improve further.

Although the curriculum does not have the impact intended on pupils' learning – especially in mathematics and in the development of literacy and numeracy in all subjects – it effectively promotes aspects of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils have a good understanding of the dangers associated with fire, roads, railways, the internet and cyber-bullying. They have opportunities to play a range of musical instruments, take part in many sports and enjoy a variety of after-school clubs. The newly refurbished outdoor area in the Early Years Foundation Stage provides children with good opportunities to develop all aspects of their learning. Safeguarding policies and procedures meet requirements.

Staff and the governing body share a genuine desire to improve pupils' life chances.

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They have successfully established an ethos where pupils say that they enjoy coming to school and feel valued. School leaders have a good knowledge of pupils' pastoral needs, especially those whose circumstances have made them vulnerable. Working with external agencies, the school provides a good level of support for these pupils, showing its commitment to promoting equality and tackling discrimination. However, some groups of pupils do not achieve well enough.

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	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



3 February 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Blanford Mere Primary School, Kingswinford, DY6 7EA

Thank you for welcoming us on our recent visit to your school. We enjoyed meeting you and visiting your lessons. We thought that you were very polite and helpful and were pleased that most of you enjoy coming to school. We found that those of you in the Early Years Foundation Stage and most of you in Key Stage 1 make good progress.

However, we judge that your school is not providing all of you with a satisfactory education and that it needs extra support in order to do so. For this reason we have decided that the school requires 'special measures'. We have asked the headteacher and staff to do a number of things, especially to improve your achievement in mathematics in Key Stage 2. These include:

- giving you more challenging work which meets your needs
- giving you more guidance with your work in lessons
- making sure that teachers' marking of your work helps you to improve
- making sure that you have plenty of opportunities to practise your literacy and numeracy skills in many subjects
- checking carefully on how well you are learning so that you make better progress
- ensuring that leaders, teachers and the governing body keep a closer check on how well the school is doing.

Other inspectors will visit your school in the near future to judge how well it is tackling these points for improvement. All of you can help your teachers by continuing to work as hard as you can.

I would like to thank you again for being so helpful and friendly.

Yours sincerely

Roy Bowers
Her Majesty's Inspector

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