

Fir Bank Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105662
Local Authority	Oldham
Inspection number	355814
Inspection dates	15–16 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Kevin Johnson

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	178
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Leslie Perry
Headteacher	Mrs Hazel Mackay
Date of previous school inspection	5 June 2008
School address	Grasmere Road Royton, Oldham Greater Manchester OL2 6SJ
Telephone number	0161 6249577
Fax number	0161 6272828
Email address	info@firbank.oldham.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
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M2 7LA

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They observed 14 lessons taught by seven teachers. Inspectors held meetings with groups of pupils, staff and members of the governing body. They observed the school's work, and looked at national assessment data and the school's assessments, samples of pupils' work, policies, minutes of the meetings of the governing body and safeguarding documentation. Also taken into account were 50 questionnaires returned by parents and carers as well as those completed by staff members and pupils.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Are the more-able pupils, and those considered vulnerable, sufficiently challenged?
- Has the school accurately gauged the progress of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?
- What is the impact of care, guidance and support and the curriculum on pupils' personal development?

Information about the school

Most pupils in this smaller-than-average-sized primary school are White British. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is average. There is a higher than average proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities. A significant number of pupils joined the school at other than usual times throughout the past three years. There is pre-school and after-school care on site, but this is not managed by the governing body and as such was not part of this inspection. The school has achieved several awards for its promotion of health and the curriculum. Among the most recent are International Schools Award, Activemark and Healthy Schools status.

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

This is a good school. The headteacher's incisive leadership and the dedicated work of staff and the governing body have moved the school from being satisfactory to good since the last inspection. There have been significant improvements in teaching, assessment, provision and leadership, amply demonstrating the school's good capacity for improvement. Leaders know their school well and are entirely accurate in their self-evaluation. They have successfully tackled previous weakness and engendered a strong collective drive for further success.

Children get off to a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage from broadly expected levels of development for their age. Improved provision and leadership in the Reception Year over the past three years are having a notable impact on progress and attainment in Years 1 and 2. Attainment at the end of Year 2 shows good improvement on previous years and, currently, is on track to be above average this year. The impact of this positive start is not yet seen at the end of Key Stage 2 despite a clearly improving trend, especially in the number of pupils who attain above expected levels. Although more focused assessment and target-setting are beginning to show results, attainment in English and mathematics at the end of Year 6 is still broadly average and is recognised by the school as an area for improvement.

The quality of teaching and learning has been a major focus for improvement and is consistently good. Teachers plan well and use resources effectively to bring learning to life. This results in pupils' good enjoyment of school, and their good progress and achievement in lessons. Because of the outstanding whole-school approach to care, guidance and support there is no underachievement. This has also underpinned the settling in of new pupils, many of whom have experienced barriers to learning before they join the school. The curriculum provides pupils with interesting topics and challenge, and the opportunity to apply their information and communication technology and other skills effectively.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They are invariably polite and well mannered. Always mindful of others, they show tolerance and understanding of different cultures within the school. Their attitude towards maintaining a healthy lifestyle is outstanding.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment in English and mathematics at Key Stage 2 by:
 - sharing the best classroom practice more effectively across the school

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- providing more opportunities for pupils to assess their own progress and set targets
- ensuring that next steps for improvement identified in marking are always acted upon by pupils.
- ensuring that time allocated to reading promotes pupils' higher-level reading skills effectively and further develops their enjoyment of books

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Pupils get the best out of their lessons because of their good behaviour and attitudes to learning. Teachers expect hard work and initiative, and pupils rise to the challenges which they provide. For example, a pupil was offered a calculator to help solve a two-part number problem but successfully did the calculation mentally and only used the calculator to check the answer. Pupils work well with partners and willingly help each other by discussing problems. They know what to do to improve their work but not all pupils have opportunities to assess their own work regularly and set targets for themselves.

Progress, throughout the school, has gathered pace due to more effective teaching. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, as well as those from other potentially vulnerable groups, all progress well and some make rapid progress. This is because of well-tailored learning plans, which match specific needs, and equally well-targeted and sensitive adult support, which helps pupils to access their learning alongside others. A good measure of the progress pupils make is seen in Year 3, where pupils currently work at the levels expected for their age, having begun the year with below-average attainment. Inspection evidence indicates continued improvement in the proportion of pupils likely to achieve Level 5 at the end of Year 6, following the school's successful strategy to target the more-able pupils.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They do not tolerate racism or bullying and know how to deal with it, should it occur. Pupils not only understand the benefits of a sensible diet and regular exercise, but the effect on their body of not keeping to a healthy lifestyle. School council members are watchful guardians over pupils' healthy food choices and others act as play leaders and run the healthy tuck shop as further encouragement. Pupils contribute well to the smooth day-to-day running of the school by conscientiously carrying out additional duties. They effectively develop the skills needed for their economic well-being through their above average attendance, good personal qualities, and opportunities to use enterprise skills in order to make a handsome profit.

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

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	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
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	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

How effective is the provision?

Teachers have high expectations and use their good knowledge of their subject and pupils' varying abilities to plan the right challenges and build well on what pupils can do. Learning objectives are clear. They are shared with pupils and focus on what they will know or be better at by the end of the lesson. Consequently, pupils know what is expected of them and are motivated to learn. Information and communication technology is used effectively, both by teachers and by pupils who use computers routinely to support their learning. Although senior leaders have identified where the strongest classroom practice occurs, they are aware of the need to share this more effectively throughout the school, in order to raise the quality of teaching and learning and, subsequently, pupils' attainment, even further. Teachers use assessment information well to set targets and check progress over time. Daily assessment, through questioning during lessons, for example, and marking, provides clear guidance for pupils, but some of the impact is lost because teachers do not always ensure that specific challenges in marking have been taken up by the pupils, so the next steps for improvement have to be repeated. Teaching assistants are well informed and work closely with teachers to make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning.

The curriculum enables pupils to achieve well. A revised approach to planning has opened up opportunities for pupils to use skills across a range of subjects to make learning more meaningful and promote imaginative work. Time devoted daily to reading, however, is not used to best advantage and does not readily inspire pupils to read more or use books

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creatively. A good example of the creative curriculum is the Forest School, which enables pupils to learn how to manage their outdoor environment and is a useful stimulus for learning. The curriculum is enriched well by a good range of after-school clubs and visits to places of interest which broaden pupils' personal horizons.

The school's ethos is underpinned by the exceptional pastoral care provided for all pupils. Parents' and carers' confidence in the school is overwhelming and is endorsed by pupils who say that there are trusting relationships with adults and always someone to give help when it is needed. The school's highly-effective liaison with relevant agencies ensures that specific physical and learning needs are met and enable potentially vulnerable pupils to achieve well. Personalised support is effectively closing attainment gaps between different groups of pupils. Arrangements for pupils entering and leaving the school are supportive and parents and carers appreciate that they have a voice in school affairs and are kept fully informed about their children's progress.

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?

Determined leadership at all levels has successfully guided the school through a period of good improvement. The opening up of training opportunities for staff and their recognition of how they are accountable have nurtured a clear vision and ambition for the school's future. Rigorous training, monitoring and evaluation, combined with some astute staff appointments, mean that good teaching is firmly established. The governing body is an effective partner in this improvement. It knows the school well and offers robust challenge over the school's academic performance and future planning. Leaders work diligently to ensure that discrimination is challenged and they monitor provision and outcomes for pupils rigorously to ensure equality of opportunity.

Safeguarding procedures are good. Clear policies and procedures are fully understood and all are based on good practice. Pupils gain awareness of their responsibilities through the curriculum, and there is effective work with a range of agencies to ensure prompt response to any concerns. Highly-productive links with parents and carers ensure that they have a strong voice in school matters. The Parents' Forum, a group which has been instrumental in writing the homework policy, is soon to have an input into the promotion of community cohesion. The school has clearly identified its future plans, and is already an active partner in bringing together schools with contrasting characteristics in the locality and in Jordan. Initial exchanges have already taken place. Leaders acknowledge, nevertheless, that this activity is at an early stage and that the promotion of community cohesion is currently satisfactory.

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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	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Good leadership in the Early Years Foundation Stage has brought about good improvement in provision and children's progress since the last inspection. By the end of Reception, all children are securely within their early learning goals and a minority have reached or exceeded their expectations in some areas of learning. There is a strong focus on children's personal, social and emotional development. Consequently, they learn to be tolerant of one another, play harmoniously, and become reliable and independent learners. They are also supportive of each other as seen, for example, when a child looked at another's painting and commented, 'That's beautiful!' The environment is used well and exciting challenges set up indoors are followed up outside through children's imaginative play. Teachers follow up children's interest when they plan the curriculum. For example, their interest in animals resulted in the establishment of a 'veterinary surgery', which engaged children extremely well in their language development as they acted out their roles. Provision for children's welfare is good. Their well-being is given high priority and care is taken to record their progress so that further challenges can be planned. Strong links with parents and carers add to children's feeling of security and provide good opportunities for home-school partnerships which benefit children's learning and development well.

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

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

A small minority of parents and carers returned questionnaires. The responses were virtually entirely positive. A few wrote supportive comments about the school's improvement and the care provided. The single concerns relating to behaviour management and progress were raised with school leaders while protecting respondents' anonymity.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Fir Bank 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 50 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 178 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	34	68	16	32	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	37	74	12	24	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	33	66	17	34	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	26	52	22	44	2	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	32	64	17	34	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	32	64	18	36	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	31	62	19	38	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)	29	58	17	34	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	30	60	19	38	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	22	44	26	52	1	2	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	24	48	25	50	1	2	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	40	80	10	20	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	31	62	19	38	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	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.



17 March 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Fir Bank Primary School, Oldham OL2 6SJ

You made us feel very welcome when we came to inspect your school recently. It was a delight to talk to you about your work and especially your successful enterprise in home-made confectionary! On behalf of all three inspectors I would like to thank you for your politeness and good manners. We noticed how well behaved you are and that you know a great deal about how to stay healthy. Most importantly, your attendance is above average, so do keep that up.

Your school has improved a lot since it was last inspected. That is because your school leaders, especially your headteacher, have worked hard to make sure that has happened. You make good progress and reach average standards in English and mathematics. All your lessons are good and help you to learn well. The grown-ups in school take excellent care of you and, overall, Fir Bank is a good school.

I know that your parents and carers, teachers and the governing body are just as proud of your school as you are. Like you, they would like to see it continue to improve. Therefore, we have asked your teachers to help you reach higher standards in English and mathematics by making sure that every lesson is as good as the very best. Also we have asked them to let you assess your own work more often and set your own targets. There is also something you can all do. When your teachers tell you your next steps, by marking your work, make sure you do those things so you do not have to be told again later. Your teachers will be checking for this! Finally, we have asked your school leaders to think of how you might make better use of all of your reading time so that you become more skilful readers and enjoy books even more.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Johnson
Lead inspector

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