

Grange Valley Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104774
Local authority	St. Helens
Inspection number	377127
Inspection dates	23–24 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Joanne Olsson 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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	207
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nigel Rouch
Headteacher	Ian Hardman
Date of previous school inspection	8 January 2009
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. Twelve lessons led by eight teachers were observed. Inspectors made several visits to classrooms to observe the teaching of reading. They also visited the Early Years Foundation Stage and observed children at play and at work. Meetings were held with groups of pupils, senior leaders and managers, members of the governing body and the previous School Improvement Partner. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, including arrangements for safeguarding, information about pupils' attainment and progress and pupils' books. They considered the responses to questionnaires from staff, pupils and 124 parents and carers.

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

- Whether all pupils are making consistently good and sometimes outstanding progress from their starting points, particularly in writing.
- Whether the achievement gaps between pupils in Key Stage 1, girls and more-able pupils are rapidly closing.
- How effectively the school has secured improvements in the quality of teaching to enable all groups of pupils to make at least good and often exceptional progress from their starting points.
- The impact of all leaders and managers, including members of the governing body, in driving improvements to teaching and to pupils' achievement.

Information about the school

This is a slightly smaller than average-sized primary school. The vast majority of pupils are from White British heritages. The number of pupils from minority ethnic groups is low, as is the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. There are fewer pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and fewer pupils with a statement of special educational needs than found nationally. The school has received a number of awards, including the Activemark and the Basic Skills Award. During the inspection, two members of staff were on maternity leave.

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

A common sense of purpose and a shared drive to promote pupils' enjoyment, achievement and well-being mean this good school has improved considerably since the previous inspection. 'We are just like a massive family' is a typical comment from pupils, who are very proud of their school and make an outstanding contribution to its success. Pupils say they enjoy school and this is reflected in their positive attitudes and above-average attendance. Their respectful and considerate behaviour makes a significant contribution to their learning. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about almost all aspects of the school. The views of many are summed up in the comment 'Grange Valley is a wonderful school'.

Most pupils enter nursery with skills and knowledge that are low for their age. They make good progress across the school and leave Year 6 with attainment levels that broadly match the national average. Pupils' achievement in English, particularly writing, has improved because they have ample opportunity to write for a variety of purposes across a range of subjects. Although boys' attainment is higher at the end of Key Stage 2, there is little variation in the achievement of boys and girls across the school. Pupils in Key Stage 1 make good progress from their lower-than-average starting points so their attainment levels are improving. Although pupils' overall achievement has improved since the previous inspection, not enough pupils are reaching the higher levels in English or mathematics.

The quality of teaching is good; sometimes it is inspirational. Teachers plan lively and imaginative lessons which make pupils' learning purposeful and fun. Assessment information is used well to make sure activities meet the needs of most pupils, although the tasks for more-able pupils sometimes lack challenge. Teachers' marking is thorough and celebrates achievement. Pupils' receive very clear guidance on how to improve their writing style but gaps in basic skills, such as spelling, handwriting and punctuation are not systematically addressed. The teaching of early reading is strong, but is less well developed for older pupils. This is because independent reading activities sometimes lack purpose and there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to read for purpose and pleasure across the curriculum.

Tenacious leadership by the headteacher, ably supported by a team of increasingly strong leaders and managers has driven forward improvements in the school and has promoted outstanding partnerships with a range of external institutions. Former shortcomings have been eradicated because of clear development plans, focused

staff development and outstanding partnerships to support pupils' learning and well-being. Regular monitoring activities mean that self-evaluation is accurate. However, these monitoring activities are not always focused sharply enough on the progress that all pupils, particularly the most able, are making. Nonetheless, senior leaders and managers, including members of the governing body, know their school well and they have the support and confidence of pupils, staff and parents and carers. Consequently the school's capacity to secure further improvements is good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise pupils' achievement further, particularly for more-able pupils by:
 - ensuring all activities for the most-able pupils are precisely matched to their needs and provide sufficient challenge
 - ensuring teachers' marking systematically addresses any gaps in pupils' spelling, punctuation and handwriting skills
 - ensuring all monitoring activities focus sharply on pupils' learning and the progress all groups are making.
- Improve the teaching of reading in Key Stage 2 by:
 - ensuring independent reading tasks are purposeful and relevant so they meet the needs and interests of all pupils
 - ensuring pupils are aware of the progress they are making in reading and what they need to do to improve
 - providing greater opportunities for pupils to read for purpose and pleasure across the curriculum.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

'Wow!' and 'this is fun!' are typical comments from pupils during lessons. They thoroughly enjoy their learning and apply themselves well to all activities. In a Year 6 English lesson, pupils worked with tremendous enthusiasm to investigate how puns are used in headlines. They shared their ideas and worked with exceptional levels of independence to decode hidden clues around the classroom. In a Year 1 English lesson, all pupils wrote imaginative descriptions of a story-book character. They used their strong knowledge of the sounds letters make to tackle new and often complex words confidently. They independently checked their work to make sure it matched the precise targets the teacher had provided. Activities such as these excite and challenge pupils. They equip them with the skills to be responsible for their own learning and behaviour while allowing them to become critical and reflective thinkers.

Pupils' achievement in writing and mathematics is strong. This is because their skills are systematically built on as they move throughout the school and they have regular opportunities to write at length and carry out investigations across a range of subjects. Pupils' achievement in reading is strong overall, but some older pupils are not always sure what they need to do to improve their reading skills. More-able pupils do not always receive enough challenge to enable them to make swifter progress. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make consistently good progress because of the effective support they receive from skilled teaching

assistants. Although the attainment of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is lower than the national average, this group are making better progress than their peers. As a result, gaps in achievement are being successfully narrowed.

Pupils say they feel safe and they are confident any issues they raise are taken seriously and dealt with effectively. Pupils have a sound understanding of how to keep themselves safe and they talk with confidence about the strategies they use to protect themselves when using personal computers at home. Pupils know a balanced diet and exercise helps them to lead a healthy lifestyle. Older pupils have a keen awareness of the dangers related to smoking and alcohol misuse. Pupils take their responsibilities very seriously. The school council is proud of the contribution it has made to the school grounds, while the play leaders work hard to make playtime fun for younger pupils. Pupils show their interest in the community by working with pupils in another primary school and through the positive relationship they have forged with the local retirement home. Pupils' very well developed personal qualities, in addition to secure basic skills mean they are well prepared for the future.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

How effective is the provision?

All teaching is characterised by warm and trusting relationships. Lessons are relevant and interesting because teachers link learning to everyday life. Teachers use a wide range of strategies to motivate pupils and maximise the use of time. Some teaching is exceptional. This is because teachers are skilled at organising activities so pupils can acquire new skills and knowledge with high levels of independence. Every opportunity is taken to consolidate prior learning and extend pupils' thinking. These teachers provide precise guidance so pupils know what they are aiming for and are able to measure their own success. However, teaching does not always meet the needs of the most-able pupils. The teaching of early reading is systematic and thorough. Teachers provide good opportunities for older pupils to read and discuss texts with adults. However, independent reading activities sometimes lack purpose and are not always carefully matched to pupils' reading abilities.

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

The well-organised and imaginative curriculum meets the needs of most pupils because there is a good balance between academic and creative areas of learning. Pupils' obvious delight and skill in using stringed instruments to perform a Christmas carol during a music lesson is a typical outcome of the school's effective provision. Good opportunities to link subjects together mean pupils have purposeful opportunities to use their writing and mathematical skills in a range of contexts. However, there are insufficient opportunities for older pupils to read for purpose and pleasure across the curriculum. Pupils' personal and academic development is enriched by a wide range of themed days, visits and visitors.

'Teachers are always looking out for you' is a typical comment from the overwhelming majority of pupils who agree adults in the school care about them. Well-founded systems and effective partnerships mean individuals and groups of pupils receive the support they need to make progress in their learning and personal development. Good induction procedures and transition arrangements are in place so pupils quickly settle into the nursery and Year 1. However, as the school recognises, this good practice is not as common when pupils move from Year 2 to Year 3. Rigorous systems for monitoring pupils' absence and rewarding good attendance have led to a rapid improvement in the attendance rates for those pupils with the highest levels of absence. Consequently, attendance rates have increased and are now higher than the national average.

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	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Determined leadership and decisive action have led to considerable improvements in almost all aspects of the school's work. Senior leaders and managers make a valuable contribution to the school's success because they have a clear understanding of their role and they share the headteacher's ambition for the future. The systems to check the quality of teaching are regular and effective. Consequently, teaching is consistently good. However, these monitoring activities do not always focus sharply enough on the progress all pupils make on a day-to-day basis. Assessment information is used well to identify any pupils at risk of underperforming and swift action is taken to tackle any underachievement. Members of the re-invigorated governing body have increased their effectiveness because of the targeted training they have received. Due to their clear role in monitoring the school's performance, members of the governing body have an accurate and honest understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

Positive relationships with parents and carers are fostered through regular newsletters and electronic communication. In response to the suggestions made by some parents and carers, the school introduced an additional parents' evening and

broadened the range of after-school clubs. Partnerships are outstanding because they are used to enhance almost every aspect of school-life: for example, links with local schools has led to a whole-school learning and teaching strategy, while all pupils took part in the Junior Chef Academy to develop basic cooking skills. Pupils are appropriately supervised during break and lunchtimes and the procedures for safeguarding meet statutory requirements. However, as the school recognises, the systems for assuring these procedures sometimes lack rigour. Community cohesion is effectively promoted because the school has an accurate understanding of its own context and has established strong links with a school in another community to develop pupils' understanding of cultural diversity. The school itself is a very cohesive because all forms of discrimination are appropriately tackled. The narrowing of achievement gaps between different groups of pupils means the school's provision for equality of opportunity is good.

These are the grades for the 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	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
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

When most children join the Early Years Foundation Stage, what they know and what they can do is much lower than expected for their age. Most children make good progress from this starting point and enter Year 1 with skills and knowledge that are slightly below average. Children enjoy their time in nursery and reception. They are enthusiastic and need little prompting to participate. For example, all children thoroughly enjoyed the group singing session in the nursery. Children are willing to cooperate and share resources. This was evident as two children worked very well together on a letter recognition game. They took turns and showed real delight when they or their partner found a matching pair. Children are equally content to work independently and often show sustained levels of concentration. Children work and play safely. They show pride in their area by taking an active role during tidy-up time.

The well-organised and welcoming classrooms enable different groups to make good progress across all areas of learning. Adults support learning well because their intervention is timely and they use questions effectively to extend children's knowledge and skills. Planning is well informed by accurate on-going assessment. As

a result, activities are imaginative, exciting and well matched to the needs and interests of the children. Activities to develop early number and reading skills are well developed because teachers have good subject knowledge. The outdoor environment fully reflects all of the areas of learning. Consequently, children's learning is equally strong whether they are indoors or working outside.

The Early Years Foundation Stage is well led and managed; adults are clear about their roles and responsibilities and work collaboratively to support children's learning. The priorities to secure further improvement are accurate because they are based on regular monitoring activities and effective communication between nursery and reception staff. Positive relationships with parents and carers are fostered through effective communication. The 'Holiday Books' provide valuable information about children's interests at home and are used well to ensure they settle quickly into the setting.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

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

Views of parents and carers

The return rate for the questionnaires was higher than is usual in primary schools. Almost all the parents and carers who returned the questionnaire agree that their children enjoy school and are kept safe. The overwhelming majority consider teaching at the school to be good and that the school helps them to support their children's learning. The vast majority also believe that the school is effectively led and managed. A few were not so content with the manner in which unacceptable behaviour is handled. Inspectors looked at these concerns carefully and the findings are included within this report.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Grange Valley 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 124 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 207 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	95	77	29	23	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	99	80	23	19	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	87	70	35	28	1	1	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	93	75	30	24	1	1	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	102	82	22	18	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	84	68	39	31	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	80	65	44	35	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)	79	64	43	35	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	79	64	42	34	1	1	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	76	61	40	32	7	6	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	78	63	43	35	1	1	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	96	77	27	22	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	98	79	25	20	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 is for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 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 2010/11 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.



25 November 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Grange Valley Primary School, St Helens – WA11 0XQ

Thank you for making the inspection team feel at home and welcome when we recently came to inspect your school. It was a real treat to meet you and listen to your views about school. You told us lots of positive things because you are very proud of your school. We consider Grange Valley to be a good school. These are the main things we found out about your school.

- Your school has improved since the last time it was inspected.
- You make good progress over time and your attainment is average.
- You enjoy school, feel safe and trust the adults who care for you. You attend school regularly.
- You enjoy your learning; you are willing to work hard and you behave well in lessons and around the school.
- You are keen to take on responsibilities around school and you are interested in your local community.
- Teachers are good at making your learning interesting and fun.

In order to make your school even better, we have asked the governing body to work with the headteacher and staff to focus on a few key areas. We have asked them to make sure those of you who are more able always receive challenging work. We have also asked them to improve the teaching of reading for older pupils by giving you more opportunities to read in different subjects.

We are sure that with such positive personal qualities you will help your teachers and headteacher to improve the school further. Please accept our warmest wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Joanne Olsson
Her Majesty's Inspector

