

Black Firs Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111045
Local authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	378221
Inspection dates	21–22 September 2011
Reporting inspector	Angela Westington 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	266
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	D Whitewright
Headteacher	Martin Casserley
Date of previous school inspection	2 October 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. They observed 19 lessons or part lessons taught by 16 teachers and two teaching assistants. Inspectors met with parents, groups of pupils, members of the governing body and staff. They observed the school's work and looked at the school's development plans, systems for tracking pupils' progress, planning documentation, governing body records and minutes, records for individual pupils, safeguarding documentation and recruitment and vetting records. Responses to questionnaires returned by pupils, staff and the 112 returned by parents and carers were analysed and also taken into account.

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

- Whether all pupils, and groups of pupils, in each key stage, make as much progress as they could.
- Whether pupils' outcomes, the quality of teaching and the wider provision have improved significantly since the last inspection.

Information about the school

This is an average-sized school. The great majority of pupils are of White British heritage and only a few are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The school has few pupils whose first language is believed not to be English. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is much lower than usual. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average as is the proportion with a statement of special educational needs. There are more girls than boys in the school. The school has a number of awards including the Healthy Schools Award, the Inclusion Quality Mark award, the Sport England Active Mark and Arts Council Gold 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: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

This is a satisfactory school. Pupils' personal outcomes are good. They enjoy school very much: they report feeling safe and they have a good understanding of how to live a healthy life. By the end of Year 6, pupils consistently attain above average standards. During their time in school, they make satisfactory progress. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are potentially vulnerable make satisfactory progress overall.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Teaching is strongest in the Early Years Foundation Stage and upper Key Stage 2 and, consequently, pupils make most progress in these year groups. A particular feature of the school's philosophy is the team teaching that takes place across two year groups in Key Stage 1, lower Key Stage 2 and upper Key Stage 2. This collaborative approach involves all teachers, unqualified teachers and teaching assistants sharing teaching responsibilities. Benefits of this approach include the smaller groupings and ratios of adults to pupils. However, the monitoring of the quality of the teaching and learning that takes place, through direct lesson observations, is limited. Some pupils make insufficient progress in these lessons. The school acknowledges that, for some pupils, their progress stalls, but believes that over the seven-year timeframe pupils achieve well and gain good results. The inspection team found that, on a day-to-day basis, the work produced by pupils was not as good as would be expected, given the school's results in national tests for 11-year-olds and that pupils could make better progress and achieve higher standards in their lessons and.

Leadership and management are satisfactory with aspects that are good. The school's provision for the care, guidance and support of pupils is also good. The very large majority of parents are happy with the education and care that their children receive.

The school's curriculum is vibrant and is a key feature of the school. There is a wide range of out-of-school clubs, sports activities and music activities which pupils enjoy and parents appreciate. The school has fostered strong links with the local pre-school and other partners.

Although not all areas of weakness identified at the last inspection have been fully tackled, there has been some improvement in other areas. The school has satisfactorily improved pupils' understanding of healthy living, introduced an

electronic system to track pupils' progress and completed ambitious building projects to relocate the staffroom, headteacher's office and extend some classroom spaces. The school has a broadly accurate view of its work although it overestimates the progress that pupils make and the quality of teaching. Given all this, it has satisfactory capacity to improve further.

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

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase rates of progress made by pupils in Key Stage 1 and in Years 3 and 4, and raise standards further in English and mathematics by:
 - improving the quality and consistency of teaching
 - ensuring a better match of work to pupils' abilities.

- Improve the leadership and management of teaching and learning by:
 - monitoring more rigorously the team teaching across the school, including that undertaken by unqualified staff
 - ensuring that action is taken to ensure improvement.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is above that expected. They make satisfactory, but uneven, progress from the Early Years Foundation Stage to Year 6. The greatest gains in learning occur in Year 6, where some pupils experience dramatic improvements in English and mathematics, including pupils new to the school and those in receipt of one-to-one support. However, in Years 3 and 4, pupils' progress stalls. Pupils enter Key Stage 1 very well placed to cope with the National Curriculum, but their progress in reading and writing does not keep pace and very few attain the higher levels in the national assessments for seven-year-olds. In both key stages there are significant variations in the quality of work that pupils produce and in progress in reading.

Pupils report that they enjoy school very much, particularly the range and breadth of the topics they study and activities they engage in. They enjoy the food on the chilled salad bar, grow their own vegetables, keep hens and use the eggs in their cookery sessions. Older pupils 'buddy up' with the youngest children and read to them. The road safety officer and eco officer meet fortnightly to set their own agenda to take into governing body meetings. The school council visits the local council offices to learn about the democratic process and take their role very seriously.

Pupils have good links with the local area, visiting a nursing home, collecting food for elderly residents and singing at local events. Pupil support for local and international charities is strong.

During this inspection, pupils behaved well. A very small minority of parents raised poor behaviour and bullying as an issue. Inspectors observed some low level lack of engagement in lessons where teaching was less effective. Pupils told inspectors that any bullying that takes place is quickly dealt with. Attendance is high in all groups of pupils and there is no persistent absence. Pupils report feeling very safe in school: 'It's a really friendly place to be, I love it,' is a common sentiment. They are especially enthusiastic about the residential trip to Anglesey.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. The school tracks pupils' progress over time. Assessment activities are carried out and are recorded in each pupil's book. These are highly attractive records of pupils' work and pupils are very proud of them. Teachers' marking of pupils' written work is often cursory and pupils' targets do not always relate to their stage of development, or to the work provided. In some instances, all pupils do the same activity with support for the least able provided by adults. In such instances, pupils are often not stretched to produce their best work.

The school is enriched by a wide range of extra-curricular activities, trips and visitors. These make a strong contribution to pupils' personal development. The well established links between subjects enliven the study themes which pupils enjoy. Out of school clubs are well attended. There is a good range of partnership activity to extend the curriculum, such as full orchestra support from the local authority. The curriculum though does not have sufficient impact on ensuring good progress in English and mathematics.

Provision for the care, guidance and support of pupils is good. The school has well established links with a number of external support agencies, including Child and Mental Health Services and speech therapists to support pupils. The school's good play therapy is well regarded by parents and carers. Transition arrangements for the youngest children moving from pre-school to the Reception Class and from Reception

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

to Year 1 are good. Parents and carers commented individually about the help and support that they had received from the school for their child or at times of family stress.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

Aspects of leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides a clear vision and articulates a very specific philosophy for the school, which all staff and governors support. The school is a welcoming and vibrant community. Members of the governing body are closely involved in the work and strategic direction of the school. They are visible in and around school and have good relationships with staff. Individual members of the governing body have specific curriculum roles to keep abreast of developments. All safeguarding and statutory duties are well met. The governing body and staff are rigorous in this regard. Parents appreciate the new methods for keeping them informed about school life, for example, via text messaging and class blogs and the vast majority believe that any concerns they may have are heard and acted upon. The school promotes community cohesion well.

Leadership and management of the quality of teaching and learning are satisfactory. The headteacher reports that most of the monitoring undertaken is not systematic. Subject coordinators have undertaken some direct observation of group sessions and/or lessons and they produce a regular report for the governing body and the curriculum committee. However, the reports and records on lesson observations provide limited feedback. Senior leaders track pupils' progress via the electronic system but, as the inspection team found, this data does not always match the targets set for pupils and recorded in their books. Although results by the end of Year 6 are above average the school is not able to say whether all pupils and groups are doing as well as they could.

These are the grades for the leadership and management

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

The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3
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Early Years Foundation Stage

Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skill levels above those expected for this age group. They have particularly good speech and language and number skills on entry. During their year in Reception Class the children acquire good early reading and writing skills and very good social skills. They make good progress across all areas of learning and, by the time they enter Year 1, the vast majority meet or exceed expectations.

The children are well cared for, are secure, happy and confident. They enjoy the activities organised for them and are confident enough to initiate conversations and talk about what they are doing. The Reception class is well managed. Several parents and carers praised the work of the Reception class staff and highlighted how pleased they were with the progress their child had made.

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 in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

One hundred and twelve parents and carers returned completed questionnaires. The largest proportion of negative responses were to do with the extent to which the school helps parents and carers to support their child’s learning, and the extent to which the school takes account of suggestions and concerns. Almost all parents and carers expressed satisfaction with the school and said that their children enjoyed the time they spent there.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Black Firs 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 112 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 266 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	77	69	30	27	1	1	3	3
The school keeps my child safe	72	64	33	29	5	4	1	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	48	43	51	46	9	8	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	50	45	50	45	8	7	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	63	56	46	41	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	41	37	53	47	14	13	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	51	46	56	50	4	4	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)	53	47	43	38	6	5	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	54	48	46	41	9	8	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	38	34	59	53	9	8	4	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	34	30	57	51	12	11	3	3
The school is led and managed effectively	45	40	56	50	9	8	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	59	53	49	44	2	2	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.



23 September 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Black Firs Primary School, Congleton, CW12 4QJ

As you know, I recently visited your school with two colleagues. Thank you for being so kind and helpful and for welcoming us to your school. Thank you especially to those of you whom we met. We enjoyed meeting you and hearing about what you like about school.

We found that there are lots of good things about your school.

- You get good results in tests at age 11.
- The children in the Reception class do well.
- You enjoy all the different activities on offer at school.
- You feel safe and you know how to keep healthy.
- The adults in school look after you well and take good care of you.

We think though that the school is satisfactory overall because some of your lessons could be better and some of you could make better progress. We have asked your headteacher to check on this in the future.

Those of you who completed the questionnaires told us how much you enjoy school. Please remember to say thank you to the teachers and adults who take care of you. We are sure that you will continue to be good ambassadors for Black Firs.

Yours sincerely

Angela Westington
Her Majesty's Inspector

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