

Pikemere School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111042
Local authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	395305
Inspection dates	27–28 June 2012
Lead inspector	Marguerite Murphy HMI

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	203
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Julian Spears
Headteacher	Louise Gohr
Date of previous school inspection	27 September 2006
School address	Pikemere Road Alsager Stoke-on-Trent ST7 2SW
Telephone number	01270 874237
Fax number	Not applicable
Email address	admin@pikemere.cheshire.sch.uk



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Introduction

Inspection team

Marguerite Murphy
Anthony Buckley

Her Majesty's Inspector
Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors spent over 12 hours in direct observation of learning and eight teachers were seen. Meetings were held with senior leaders, teachers, groups of pupils and members of the governing body. Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised its monitoring, self-evaluation and improvement planning, and pupils' work. They took account of the responses to the online Parent View survey in planning the inspection. The responses to 76 inspection questionnaires completed by parents and carers were analysed, in addition to those from 20 members of staff and a sample of 79 pupils.

Information about the school

This is a slightly smaller than average-sized primary school. A much lower than average proportion of pupils is known to be eligible for free school meals. There is an average percentage of pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs, although a below average proportion is supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage and none speaks English as an additional language. The school meets the government's current floor standard, which sets the minimum standards for attainment and progress.

Pikemere School holds a number of awards, including Basic Skills and Inclusion Quality Marks, International School Intermediate Award and Eco Green Flag.

'Pikemere Pre-School' and 'Whizz Kids', privately-run provision on the same site, are not managed by the school and therefore were not part of this inspection.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	2

Key Findings

- Pikemere is a good school. Successful actions have been taken by senior leaders to reverse the dip in pupils' progress in English that was apparent in the Key Stage 2 test results in 2011. The school is not outstanding because its overall performance has been inconsistent since the previous inspection almost six years ago.
- Pupils achieve well and reach above average attainment in reading, writing and particularly mathematics. They get off to a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage and make similarly good progress overall in Key Stages 1 and 2. Parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire unanimously agree that their children make good progress and that the school meets their children's particular needs.
- Good leadership and management have ensured that rigorous monitoring and honest self-evaluation identified areas of weakness that needed to be tackled. Senior leaders have demonstrated their ability to challenge underperformance and improve the quality of teaching, which had been too variable over the previous few years. The positive impact of this, for example on the improvements made to pupils' achievement in writing, shows the school's good capacity to sustain improvement. Expectations have been raised and leaders articulate a clear vision for improvement that is shared by staff.
- Following a period of staffing changes at classroom and leadership level, there is now better stability and the quality of teaching is good overall and occasionally outstanding. Teachers' much improved use of assessment data to support learning is resulting in better rates of progress for all groups of learners, including those who are potentially vulnerable due to their circumstances or who have special educational needs.
- Pupils' behaviour is outstanding and contributes to their keen ability to listen to adults and each other. Pupils work and get along well together in learning and playing activities. They demonstrate positive, caring attitudes, enjoy school and attend regularly. Parents and carers who completed questionnaires agree unanimously that their children feel safe at Pikemere.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Building on the recent improvements made to teaching and to pupils' writing, ensure that all learners make consistently good or better progress in all subjects, especially English, across the school by:
 - pressing on with the school's well-considered existing plans to improve the quality of teaching to consistently good and more often outstanding
 - capitalising on pupils' generally articulate speaking skills to further challenge them through higher-order questioning that requires deeper thought and detailed explanations of their ideas and responses
 - increasing the opportunities provided for pupils to engage in group discussions, for example in well-chosen topics that promote further their independent and collaborative learning
 - increasing opportunities for pupils to demonstrate their improved writing skills in more extended pieces of work.

Achievement of pupils

Children enter the school with levels of knowledge and understanding similar to, and in some respects above, those expected for their age. The stronger elements of children's skills on entry to Early Years Foundation Stage are evident in their personal and social development and their use of language for communication, which are often above average. Children's ability to link sounds and letters in preparation for reading and writing are average, although this is an area in which particularly good improvement is made during their Reception Year. A striking example of this was observed when a group of Reception children were working independently to read instructions about how to make a sandwich and help each other to carry these out, excitedly talking about and selecting their favourite filling. The children then chose to write about what they had done, again without the need for adult intervention.

Early and accurate identification of pupils' needs and careful targeting of support ensure that disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make similarly good progress to their peers. Attainment in writing has been variable and had a negative impact on the overall progress pupils made in Key Stage 2 in particular in the previous academic year. Because this was quickly identified and actions put into place right at the start of the current year, pupils now make good and sometimes better progress in their writing in all key stages. In daily grammar sessions, additional time is given to developing pupils' understanding of the 'technical elements' of writing, so that they can more confidently use them to improve the quality of their written work across the curriculum. There are relatively fewer examples of pupils completing more extended pieces of writing, and the school has recognised the need to further develop this aspect. Pupils enjoy engaging in discussions and question and answer sessions in class, although sometimes there are insufficient opportunities to do so in a way which challenges them to think more deeply and expand on their answers.

Attainment in reading is above average at the end of Key Stage 1 and for a good proportion of pupils it is well above average by the time they leave Year 6. Boys and girls alike show enjoyment of books and the majority are confident and fluent readers. The focused work on teaching phonics (letters and the sounds they make) ensures that pupils whose reading skills are less well developed also make good progress in confidently blending sounds to read unfamiliar words. The great majority of pupils leave school as confident mathematicians, with particular strengths in their understanding and recall of basic number facts. Year 1 pupils were observed making good progress in sorting objects into groups, working cooperatively and counting accurately. Higher-attaining pupils are challenged through more complex problem-solving tasks, and a small group of Year 6 pupils were showing sufficient skill to be entered for national tests in mathematics at the highest possible level for 11-year-olds. Every one of the 79 pupils who completed inspection questionnaires agreed with the statement that 'the school helps me to do as well as I can'.

Quality of teaching

Almost all parents and carers and pupils who responded to the inspection questionnaire expressed the view that teaching is good. Inspectors agree that this is now the case because improvements have been made during the last year to eradicate underperformance and develop the skills of teachers and teaching assistants, who work effectively together. As a result, all groups of pupils, including those who are disabled or have special educational needs, are enabled to make good progress. For some pupils who may have been affected more than others by changes in staffing or inconsistency in teaching quality, their progress has successfully been accelerated to narrow gaps in attainment between different year groups.

Teachers use assessment data effectively to plan lessons which meet the needs of pupils and engage their interest and motivation to learn. In a Year 3 literacy lesson pupils cooperated very well during a starter activity to mix and match root words and suffixes, taking turns and listening to each other. The teacher's questioning elicited good responses that led to pupils identifying for themselves what the success criteria for the main lesson would be: 'to persuade someone, or to change their mind'. Teachers use the school's marking policy effectively to ensure that pupils are fully aware of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. In fact, almost every pupil who completed the inspection questionnaire or spoke with inspectors agreed that 'adults in school explain to me how to improve my work'. Pupils spoke confidently about knowing their specific targets and recording when these are achieved. They are given opportunities to respond to teachers' marking comments in their books. Teachers sometimes miss opportunities to use this two-way dialogue to challenge them further, beyond pupils' short replies and spelling corrections. Occasionally, in their keenness to give clear explanations and remind pupils of what they are to do, teachers dominate too much of the lesson when there could be more time spent on independent or group work. Also, pupils' confident speaking and listening skills are not always promoted sufficiently, for instance in giving opportunities to share ideas or for older pupils to engage in debating important issues. In the best teaching observed, pupils made accelerated progress as the teacher, in an unobtrusive style, kept the pace of the lesson brisk through regular but brief reviews of learning and an emphasis on independence and collaboration.

Teachers draw on the good curriculum to promote learning and reflection that contributes well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, Year 6 pupils used their experiences on a recent residential trip to inspire their writing of imaginary diary

entries that described an 'exciting find'. Pupils talk about enjoying working with artists, participating in a writing week and sharing topic-based extended homework projects.

Teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to write for different purposes and audiences. There are relatively fewer examples of pupils completing more extended pieces of writing, and the school has recognised the need to further develop this aspect.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils say that they feel very safe and are happy to come to school. Parents and carers, staff and pupils almost unanimously agree that there is a good standard of behaviour at Pikemere. Pupils' often exemplary behaviour makes an excellent contribution to the school's calm and harmonious environment and the quality of their learning. Instances of poor behaviour or disruption to learning are so rare that pupils who spoke with inspectors remembered only one or two specific instances in the recent past simply because these were such a contrast to the typically outstanding behaviour over time. Pupils feel able to talk about any worries or concerns they may have, in the knowledge that adults will act upon these. They have a good understanding of different forms of bullying but say that incidents are very rare and would be sorted out quickly. In fact, those pupils who have responsibilities as peer mentors say there is very little for them to do now 'because there are no arguments on the playground!'

Leadership and management

Having managed a number of changes at staffing, leadership and governance levels, senior leaders and the governing body articulate a clear vision and high expectations for the school. Their practice sets a positive example and there is a strong sense of teamwork and commitment to continuous improvement. Staff who completed questionnaires expressed the unanimous view that they are proud to be a member of staff at Pikemere. The headteacher is held in high regard by governors, staff, parents and carers and is very well supported by the complementary skills of the deputy headteacher and the school's business manager. A good range of skills and experience is represented on the governing body, which is better equipped than in the past to ensure that the school is held to account for its performance. Leaders use their accurate evaluations of teaching and learning to inform key priorities for the continuous professional development and performance management of staff. The analysis of the performance of different groups or cohorts of pupils enables the school to track progress, adjust targets and identify underachievement. This contributes to the school's clear commitment to promoting equality and tackling discrimination. The school also adopts good practice in its arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils.

Leaders are discerning in their use of resources, for example in brokering the services of external consultancy in addition to local authority support. The rigour of additional challenge and advice has contributed to leaders' drive to reverse a downward trend in pupils' overall achievement in recent years. Positive partnerships, such as the school's membership of the Alsager Community Trust group, complement a good curriculum that promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and offers enjoyable enrichment activities to pupils. The addition of extra time for focused grammar work has contributed to the improvements in pupils' writing. Leaders are aware of the need to ensure that time for the teaching of mathematics across the curriculum is sufficient to maintain the significant strengths in that subject.

The school is oversubscribed and has very positive relationships with parents and carers, who are regularly asked for their views. Most agree that they are helped to support their children's learning and are kept well informed by the school, which responds well to any concerns they may have. Parents and carers who added additional comments to the inspection questionnaire expressed the typical views that: 'this is a wonderful school', 'the staff are great, very helpful and approachable', and, 'my child's educational and personal needs are consistently well met'.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	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 to 31 December 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.
Floor standards	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
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.



29 June 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Pikemere School, Stoke-on-Trent, ST7 2SW

Thank you for your warm welcome and the help you provided when the inspection team visited recently. We enjoyed watching you at work and listening to your views, which are very important to us. We are pleased to have judged your school to be good, because it has made a number of improvements recently after its performance had fallen a little following its previous inspection some time ago. You have played your part in these improvements, because your outstanding behaviour helps leaders to concentrate their efforts on making sure that teaching and learning are good.

The school is determined to continue its journey of improvement and we have talked with your headteacher, staff and governors about the things that will help them to achieve that. We have agreed on a key target for improvement to raise achievement further. That will be through making sure that teaching and learning are at least good and often outstanding in lessons. All of you know about targets and you are very good at explaining how the school's system works, so I'm sure you'll be able to help. Look out for an increase in the number of opportunities you have to do longer pieces of writing and to be involved in independent group work and debate, as we can see that you are capable of this. Also, be prepared to be challenged more by teachers' questions, so that you have to think a bit harder and explain yourself very clearly and in more depth. We're sure you'll enjoy the challenge!

Best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Marguerite Murphy
Her Majesty's Inspector
On behalf of the inspection team

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