

Medlock Valley Community School

Deanshut Road, Fitton Hill, Oldham, Greater Manchester , OL8 2PN

Inspection dates

4–5 February 2014

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|--------------------------------|----------------------|-------------|----------|
| Overall effectiveness | Previous inspection: | Good | 2 |
| | This inspection: | Good | 2 |
| Achievement of pupils | | Good | 2 |
| Quality of teaching | | Good | 2 |
| Behaviour and safety of pupils | | Good | 2 |
| Leadership and management | | Good | 2 |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics has improved significantly over the past three years. Most pupils now make good progress and reach the levels expected for their age by the end of Key Stage 2.
- The proportion of pupils who reached levels above those expected for their age at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2013 was above average in writing and well above in mathematics.
- Teaching is good. Teachers plan lessons well, have excellent relationships with pupils and praise and encourage them.
- Teaching assistants provide valuable support for pupils with different needs so that they can all make good progress.
- This is a very happy school where all pupils feel included and where they feel safe and well cared for. Pupils have good attitudes to learning, behave well and look after each other.
- The curriculum gives pupils many opportunities to reflect on their feelings and the world around them. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is, therefore, strong.
- Parents are supportive of the school and particularly appreciate opportunities to come into school and support their children in 'morning challenges'.
- The acting headteacher, who is supported well by the acting deputy headteacher, provides good leadership. They are ambitious for the school and its pupils. Actions taken in the short time since they were appointed have contributed to continuing improvements in teaching and pupils' achievement.
- Governors have a good understanding of the school. Their support, and that provided through the federation, has helped to drive improvements since the last inspection.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The overall quality of teaching is not yet outstanding. In some lessons, teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve.
- Pupils in Key Stage 1 do not yet do as well in writing as they do in reading and mathematics. Not enough of them reach levels above those expected for their age.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 18 lessons, including one observation carried out jointly with the headteacher. The inspectors listened to pupils reading and observed the teaching of early reading skills. They observed teaching in small support groups. They also looked at examples of pupils' work to obtain a view of teaching and learning over time.
- Discussions took place with pupils, parents, the Chair of Governors and the headteacher from the federated school, a representative from the local authority and the school improvement partner, senior and middle leaders, and other staff.
- The inspectors took account of one letter from a parent and 19 staff questionnaires. There were no published responses to the Ofsted on-line questionnaire, Parent View.
- The inspectors looked at a range of documents, including data on pupils' progress across the school, the school's view of its own effectiveness and its development planning, records of the quality of teaching and learning, records relating to behaviour and attendance, and documentation in relation to safeguarding.

Inspection team

| | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Christine Potter, Lead inspector | Additional Inspector |
| John Shutt | Additional Inspector |
| Julie Webster | Additional Inspector |

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a larger than average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above average.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is well above average. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is well above average. The pupil premium is additional funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils who join or leave the school, other than at the usual time, is above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school is federated with Mills Hill Primary School and there is a joint governing body.
- The school currently has an acting headteacher and an acting deputy headteacher, who have been in post since November 2013. A new headteacher has been appointed and will take up the position in September 2014.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, so that more of it is outstanding, by:
 - ensuring that teachers always have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve in lessons and give all pupils, especially those who are most able, work that is sufficiently challenging
 - making sure that pupils always present their work neatly and accurately
 - improving teachers' marking so that it always shows pupils precisely how to make their work better.
- Improve pupils' achievement in writing by the end of Key Stage 1, so that more of them reach levels higher than those expected for their age, by:
 - ensuring that pupils develop a secure understanding of phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) at an early stage
 - teaching specific skills of sentence structure and punctuation in a more systematic way
 - giving pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 plenty of exciting opportunities, both indoors and outdoors, to encourage them to practise their writing.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills that are below, and often well below, those which are typical for their age. The caring and nurturing environment means that children settle in quickly. They make good progress from their starting points, although the proportion of pupils who reach the expected levels of development by the end of the Reception class is below average.
- Pupils continue to make good progress across both Key Stages 1 and 2, and attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of both Year 2 and Year 6 has improved significantly over the past three years. Standards at the end of Key Stage 2 are now broadly in line with national averages.
- Pupils who are most able make good progress, because of the additional small-group support and 'booster' activities, which accelerate their learning. In 2013, the proportion of pupils who reached levels above those expected for their age at the end of Key Stage 2 improved from well below average in 2012, to above average in writing and well above average in mathematics. Several pupils in Year 6 are now being stretched further to help them reach the highest levels possible in mathematics and writing in 2014.
- Although standards have risen, pupils in Key Stage 1 still do not do as well in writing as they do in reading and mathematics. In particular, not enough of them reach levels above those expected for their age by the end of Year 2. Whilst the teaching of phonics has improved, it is still not consistently good enough to make sure that pupils have the skills and understanding they need at an early stage to help them to learn to write. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 screening check was below average in both 2012 and 2013.
- Pupils' progress in learning how to form a sentence and use punctuation fails to improve quickly enough because these skills are not yet taught in a well-planned systematic way across all classes. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and those in Key Stage 1 do not have enough exciting opportunities, both indoors and outdoors, to practise their writing.
- Pupils make good progress in other subjects and reach broadly average standards. Topics are chosen to interest and excite pupils. Their work shows that, particularly in Key Stage 2, they have good opportunities to develop their reading, writing and mathematical skills in other subjects. Writing tasks are clearly linked to topics, such as when pupils learnt to write newspaper reports about events in World War One.
- Pupils develop a love of reading. They are particularly enthusiastic about the new reading programme where they can use tablet technology to test their understanding of what they have read and see how well they are doing. Older pupils talk enthusiastically about different authors, and know how important reading is 'if you want to get a good job in the future'.
- Pupils who join the school during the school year, many of whom speak little or no English, are welcomed and looked after well, so that they soon feel at home. Staff are sensitive to their needs, and the good support that they receive at an early stage means that they make good progress from their starting points.
- Most disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, pupils who speak English as an additional language, and those for whom the pupil premium provides support, make good, and sometimes exceptional, progress, from their individual starting points. This demonstrates the school's commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity.
- Gaps between the achievement of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding and other pupils are generally narrow across the school. In 2013, however, pupils in Year 6 known to be eligible for free school meals were approximately two terms behind other pupils in reading, six terms behind in writing and five terms behind in mathematics. This was a reflection of the many pupils in this group who had low starting points and complex needs. It nevertheless represents good or outstanding progress for some of these pupils.

The quality of teaching**is good**

- Excellent relationships are a strong feature of all lessons. Morning challenges (complete with toast), class 'family' meetings and 'Brain Smart Starts' provide a calm start to the day, get pupils thinking and prepare them well for learning in lessons. Staff praise and encourage pupils at every possible opportunity and most of them are keen to do well.
- Pupils say that knowing how the lesson is going to go on and having clear 'steps to success' help them to make good progress. They enjoy completing their 'entry tickets' and then being able to see just how much they have learnt when they fill in their 'exit tickets'.
- Teachers demonstrate effectively what pupils are going to learn. For example, pupils in Years 3 and 4 concentrated intently as they were shown the necessary skills for measuring the perimeter of shapes, and some of them quickly discovered short cuts to help their calculations. The teaching assistant made deliberate errors to check that pupils were attentive and understood – they were very keen to correct him!
- Teachers often think of imaginative ways to interest pupils in their learning. As the teacher became 'Sir Frederick', a First World War officer, and strode into the room, pupils in Years 5 and 6 became very involved and rapidly developed their skills in asking questions that needed a full answer.
- Learning moves at a brisk pace in most lessons, because of good planning. Resources are well-prepared so that no time is wasted. Teachers regularly use activities which ensure that pupils develop their confidence and skills before moving on to independent work. As one pupil in Year 4 commented, 'It helps you not to be stuck when you're working on your own'.
- Teachers successfully encourage pupils to develop a broad range of vocabulary, including key vocabulary for different subjects. Pupils in Year 5 talked knowledgeably about denominators as they discussed fractions, while those in Year 2 were quite clear about the definition of adverbs and digraphs.
- Teaching assistants play a valuable role in helping all pupils to make good progress at all stages of the lessons, both inside and outside the classroom. They use their skills and expertise well to provide specific support for pupils with complex learning and emotional needs. They also play a key role in helping those pupils who speak little or no English. For example, one small group of pupils were learning essential English vocabulary through using pictures and tablet technology.
- In some lessons, however, teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve. In these instances, pupils' work is not sufficiently challenging, especially for those who are most able. Therefore, pupils do not always make as much progress as they could in lessons.
- Teachers do not consistently set high standards for how pupils present their work, and because of this pupils do not always set it out neatly and accurately, which can lead to errors.
- Teachers' marking has improved significantly over the past half term, and pupils now receive much more accurate feedback about how well they have done, and have better opportunities to make corrections. However, marking still does not consistently show pupils precisely how to make their work better.

The behaviour and safety of pupils**are good**

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are very proud of their school and there is a happy and welcoming atmosphere. Pupils mostly work and play together good naturedly and are smiling and polite towards adults and each other. Parents and pupils alike describe the school as having a 'real family feel' where 'even the receptionists know everybody's name'. Most pupils have good attitudes to learning, join in lessons enthusiastically and are eager to do well.
- Pupils care a lot for one another. They say that they try to look after newcomers, especially if they do not speak English. They listen respectfully to each other during class 'family' meetings as pupils talk about things that are worrying them or that they want to celebrate.
- There are very clear systems for managing pupils' behaviour. Pupils understand the consequences of their actions and learn to take responsibility for their own behaviour through

making good choices. Although there are some pupils who call out or talk when they should be working, most pupils respond quickly to teachers' instructions so that there is little disruption to learning in lessons.

- Pupils say how much they appreciate the 'safe places' provided in classrooms and other parts of the school, where they can go to 'sort out' their feelings and calm down by 'doing special breathing', which means that they can soon return to their lessons. They were keen to demonstrate the 'time machine' where they are able to sort out disagreements together.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils feel safe in school and parents and pupils agree that name-calling and bullying are extremely rare. They feel able to talk to staff about any concerns that they do have and say that these are dealt with quickly and effectively. Pupils have a good understanding of different types of bullying and learn how to keep themselves safe in different situations, including on the roads and when using the Internet.
- There are a number of pupils in the school who find it very hard to manage their feelings and behaviour. Staff are well-trained to deal with challenging situations and they calmly and effectively ensure the safety of these pupils and others around them.
- The school has worked hard to improve attendance, which was low, but is now broadly average. Families, particularly those who are new to this country, are given additional support where necessary, and pupils receive incentives and awards for good attendance.

The leadership and management are good

- The acting headteacher, with the support of the acting deputy headteacher, is successfully leading the school through the current period of transition. They are ambitious for the school and its pupils, are making sure that previous improvements are sustained and have established a clear direction for further improvement.
- Leaders, including those in middle management, have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and learning, so that pupils want to learn and are proud of what they achieve. Staff are enthusiastic and equally committed to doing the best for all the pupils. Senior leaders are well-supported by the governing body and through the school's links with the federated school, including regular support from its headteacher.
- Senior leaders know the school well and know what needs to be done to improve it further. They regularly check the quality of teaching in lessons and pupils' work and provide guidance and support for teachers to improve their teaching skills. They have taken effective action to eliminate weak teaching. Actions taken since their appointment in November are already leading to improvements in teaching, in particular to the effectiveness of teachers' marking.
- The acting headteacher has recognised the leadership potential of other staff. A number of them have taken on middle leadership roles and are receiving appropriate training. They are making an effective contribution to school improvement through supporting other teachers and checking the school's data and pupils' work to make sure that all pupils are doing as well as they should.
- The progress of individual pupils is tracked carefully. The coordinator for special educational needs works with leaders and teachers to make sure that pupils who need it are given specific and well-targeted support, including the use of outside expertise. The impact of this additional support is monitored closely to make sure that these pupils make good enough progress.
- The curriculum is generally well-organised, despite not yet providing systematic planning for the teaching of sentence structure and punctuation in Key Stage 1. Pupils are given a range of experiences to broaden their horizons, such as the recent visit to the Lowry theatre to see 'War Horse', the annual residential visit for pupils in Year 6 and opportunities for all pupils to work alongside a local artist. These, together with regular time for pupils to reflect on their feelings, those of others and issues in the wider world, contribute successfully to pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The school works hard to build strong relationships with parents, who say that they always feel able to come in and talk to staff if they are worried about anything. They are very appreciative of the care that their children receive. As one parent commented, 'My child has pretty much

blossomed here'. Parents of younger pupils love being able to come in at the start of the day to work alongside their children.

- The school makes good use of the primary school sport funding to improve pupils' physical well-being, and have purchased a much wider range of equipment for different sports in lessons and at break times. Specialist physical education teachers now provide lessons and extra-curricular sports activities for pupils of different ages. Teachers take part in and observe these lessons and so are improving their own skills in teaching physical education.
- The local authority and school improvement partner provide strong and effective support which has helped to drive improvements in teaching and achievement.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Members of the governing body are proud of the school and how it has improved over the past few years. They are especially proud of the way that the whole school community works together to support pupils and parents from widely different backgrounds so that they feel welcome and safe within the school. The well-established joint governing body with the federated school means that governors bring a wide range of skills and expertise to the school. Strengths in each school are shared and benefit both of them. The federation has therefore played a significant role in driving school improvement. Governors provide good support but also ask challenging questions about the quality of teaching and how well pupils are doing. They have a good understanding of the school, because of their regular visits, reports from the headteacher and subject leaders, and their careful scrutiny of the school's performance data. They are kept well-informed about the outcomes of teachers' performance management and ensure that decisions relating to pay progression are linked to this. Governors understand their statutory responsibilities and make sure that safeguarding arrangements meet requirements. They have a firm grasp on finances and check that pupil premium funding is used well to support eligible pupils and improve outcomes for them. They are fully committed to equality of opportunity and to tackling discrimination of any kind.

What inspection judgements mean

| School | | |
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| Grade | Judgement | Description |
| Grade 1 | Outstanding | An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment. |
| Grade 2 | Good | A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment. |
| Grade 3 | Requires improvement | A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection. |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate | <p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> |

School details

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| Unique reference number | 133710 |
| Local authority | Oldham |
| Inspection number | 432420 |

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

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 3–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 323 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Edward Moores |
| Headteacher | Joanne Backhouse (acting Headteacher) |
| Date of previous school inspection | 8 June 2011 |
| Telephone number | 0161 770 8199 |
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