



**Office for Standards
in Education**

Inspection report
Litherland Moss Primary School

Sefton Education Authority

Dates of inspection: 1-2 March 2004

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act

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Basic information about the school

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|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Name of school: | Litherland Moss Primary School |
| Type of school: | Primary |
| Status: | Community |
| Age range of pupils: | 3 to 11 years |
| Headteacher: | Mrs A Abdous |
| Address of school: | Moss Lane Litherland Merseyside L21 7NW |
| Telephone: | 0151 928 4544 |
| Name and address of appropriate authority: | The governing body, address as above |
| Chair of governors: | Mr J Roberts |
| Local education authority area: | Sefton |
| Unique reference number: | 104875 |
| Name of reporting inspector: | Mr R Hartley HMI |
| Dates of inspection: | 1-2 March 2004 |

Introduction

1. Litherland Moss Primary School is situated in a socially and economically deprived housing estate on the north-west outskirts of Liverpool. There are 160 pupils on roll, of whom 71 per cent are eligible for free school meals; this figure is well above the national average. There are 19 pupils with special educational needs, including one who has a Statement of Special Educational Need. There are three pupils who speak English as an additional language.
2. The school was inspected in May 2002. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.
3. The governors drew up an action plan to address the key issues from the inspection of May 2002. The school was visited by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) on four occasions to monitor the progress being made.
4. In March 2004 two HMI inspected the school, assessing the standard of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of May 2002.

Main findings

5. In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils. The main findings of the inspection are:
 - standards of attainment in the latest national tests at Key Stage 1 were well below the average in reading, writing and mathematics when compared with all schools nationally. When compared with schools in similar contexts, the results were average in reading but below the average in writing and mathematics. These disappointing levels reflect a legacy of some weaknesses in the teaching earlier in the key stage. The results at Key Stage 2 are more encouraging. Although they were well below the national averages in English, mathematics and science, they are higher than the previous year's figures. Compared with similar schools, the results were average in English and science and below average in mathematics; these levels of attainment represent an improvement since the May 2002 inspection;
 - standards of attainment in the lessons have improved over time. Although they remain below national expectations overall, there is an increasing number where they are at or very near the level expected for the pupils' ages, particularly in English and mathematics; in science, information and communication technology (ICT) and the foundation subjects, standards are more uneven;

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- the pupils receive a sound start to their education in the Foundation Stage Unit. Many of the pupils enter the school with limited educational experiences and weak communication skills. Although standards are low, the pupils make satisfactory progress;
 - the pupil's progress in learning was good in seven lessons, satisfactory in eight, and unsatisfactory in one. Weaknesses in teaching, and gaps in learning which have impeded progress, have largely been overcome through recent staff changes and growing confidence in setting learning objectives which match the pupils' current needs;
 - the pupils' behaviour is consistently good. The pupils respond positively to encouragement and are attentive in the lessons and keen to do well;
 - the pupils' attendance remains well below the national figure and, although there has been a slight improvement during the current year, levels remain unacceptably low;
 - the provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is satisfactory; their awareness of moral and social issues is developing well;
 - the quality of teaching was good in five lessons, satisfactory in ten and unsatisfactory in one. This represents a considerable improvement since the inspection in 2002, although the quality of teaching lacks the level of consistency to which the school aspires;
 - the teachers' planning is satisfactory and often good. Lesson plans are clear and detailed, and the activities in most lessons meet the pupils' needs. Overall, the management of time is efficient, although in some lessons the teachers spend too much time instructing the pupils or they overuse worksheets. Some lessons lack sparkle and pace because of an over-emphasis on teaching subject knowledge at the expense of trying out skills and techniques in practical contexts;
 - there is a large number of teaching assistants and voluntary helpers who support each class. They are most effective when working with small groups or managing resources but sometimes make too little contribution during whole-class sessions;
 - there is an increasing range of information about pupils' progress which is beginning to influence curriculum planning and improve the effectiveness of teaching;
 - the leadership and management of the school are at least satisfactory and often good. The headteacher has a clear view of how to make progress and raise standards, although some of the measures put in place have yet to take full effect on the quality of teaching and standards of attainment. Staffing difficulties, which until recently have dogged the school's progress, have now been resolved. The headteacher has: successfully managed difficult
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behavioural issues; introduced measures to raise the pupils' self-esteem; promoted a range of worthwhile extracurricular activities; and improved communications between the school and its community.

Key issues

6. In order to improve the pupils' quality of education further, the governors, headteacher, senior managers and staff need to:

- continue to raise standards in all the National Curriculum subjects, particularly in science and the foundation subjects;
- improve the quality of teaching to a consistently good standard;
- improve attendance.

Inspection findings

Standards achieved by the pupils

7. The school's 2003 national test results represent a variable picture between the two key stages and within the different subjects. Although they are well below national averages in both key stages, more progress has been made in Key Stage 2 than in Key Stage 1.

8. At Key Stage 1 the results were well below the national averages in reading, writing and mathematics; levels that have not changed over the past four years, except in writing where there was a slight improvement in 2002. Compared to schools in similar circumstances, the results were average in reading but below the average in writing and mathematics. These levels are disappointing; when compared with those of the previous year they have remained static in reading and mathematics and declined in writing. However, the results need to be considered against a number of extenuating circumstances, principally a legacy of indifferent teaching earlier in the key stage which affected the pupils over two years. Recent staff changes have improved matters, and the pupils' attainment and their rate of progress in learning are more assured, being consistently at or near expected levels in Years 1 and 2.

9. The results at Key Stage 2 in 2003 were more encouraging. Although they were well below the national averages in English, mathematics and science they represent an improvement on the 2002 figures, which were consistently very low. Compared to schools in similar circumstances the results were even better: they rose from well below to below average in mathematics, while in English and science levels rose from well below to average. Similar deficiencies in the quality of teaching also occurred in the earlier years of Key Stage 2, but changes to the staffing structure took place sooner than at Key Stage 1, together with a determined effort to plug gaps in the pupils' learning. Improvements in standards are more firmly established for the older pupils than in Key Stage 1.

10. Standards of attainment in the lessons have improved over time; they were at the levels expected for the pupils' ages in six lessons and below this level in the remaining ten. They are below average in the Foundation Stage Unit, reflecting the limited skills and paucity of experiences which the pupils bring with them when they enter school. Standards improve at Key Stage 1 where they are consistently at or near expected levels, while at Key Stage 2 they reach expected levels in pockets throughout the year groups, consistently so in Years 5 and 6. Standards are at their best in English and mathematics, reflecting the development work undertaken by the school, but they are more uneven in science, ICT and the foundation subjects. The changes in the school's staff profile are resulting in higher standards being more evenly spread across the year groups and classes when compared with the position at the May 2002 inspection.

11. The pupils receive a sound start to their education in the Foundation Stage Unit. Many of the pupils enter the school with limited educational experiences and weak communication skills, but the staff give priority to developing the pupils' speaking skills. The organisation of the unit has recently changed and now incorporates nursery and reception-age pupils; care is taken to provide for the separate needs of both groups, although for much of the time the pupils share common resources, for example, role play, art materials and construction equipment. The unit is well resourced, there are distinct areas for learning and the adults are deployed appropriately to support the activities. Although standards are low, the pupils make satisfactory progress.

12. At Key Stages 1 and 2, standards in English are below national expectations overall. Speaking skills are showing improvement but from a low base. The pupils on the whole are eager to talk, but their vocabulary is often limited and at times they speak without clarity. The teachers put much emphasis on pupils talking about their ideas, and questioning them to make sure they have understood something before moving to the next stage in the lesson. However, the pupils find it difficult to explain their thinking about why things happen or how they reached a conclusion, for example, in making a mathematical calculation. Nevertheless, there are firm signs of improvement in the range of speaking opportunities provided by the teachers; for example, in role play and the use of a puppet theatre to enact favourite stories in the Key Stage 1 class, and in giving a presentation on topical issues to the rest of the class in Years 5 and 6.

13. The pupils listen well to each other and to adults, although it has not always been so, because of serious behavioural problems which fragmented many of the lessons, particularly at Key Stage 2. However, rapid improvements in behaviour have created a good context for listening, and most of the pupils are alert to instructions, show interest in what others have to say and listen well in the majority of the lessons where the work provides stimulation and challenge.

14. Standards in reading are improving slowly. There are guided reading sessions for each class which supplement the reading elements in the literacy lessons. These additional sessions are well planned and provide the pupils with opportunities to read with an adult and also to practise their skills across a range of activities such as researching reference books, playing word games, reviewing books, and analysing text. Opportunities to involve the pupils in reading during literacy lessons are firmly established. Year 5 and 6 pupils, for instance,

enjoyed reading poetry together as a prelude to detailed work on argument and persuasion in writing.

15. The school's book stock has been systematically improved, and teachers have a comprehensive list of books banded according to the level of difficulty. The profile of reading has been raised by a recent initiative to encourage parents to read with their child in class. The scheme is gathering pace and worked well in a session observed at Key Stage 1.

16. The range of writing is reasonably broad with good examples of letter writing, poetry, news reports, descriptions, extended stories, and instructional writing. The length of much of the writing could usefully be extended for, although most of the pupils take a good deal of care over their writing, their vocabularies and general writing skills are restricted so that the amount produced is limited given the time allowed. Nevertheless, the pupils are gaining a structured range of skills, to make their writing more interesting; for example, using connectives, speech marks and tense changes and broadening their use of adjectives and adverbs. There are examples of the pupils being encouraged to apply some basic writing skills in other curriculum areas, for instance, in science and history; at times, however, weak spelling reduces the quality of this work.

17. Standards in mathematics are below national expectations overall, although there are signs that specific weaknesses, such as a lack of opportunity to apply number skills in practical contexts and limited strategies to make calculations, are being addressed. At Key Stage 1, the pupils are able to: identify a 'secret' number between two other numbers; understand the terms 'in between', 'more than' and 'less than'; count sets of cubes to represent halves and quarters of whole numbers; calculate sums of money required in shopping; and use simple division to share equally. Older pupils can round up and down, add on and count back when calculating money; and use multiplication and division to find out the money raised in a sponsored event. However, there are still major gaps in the pupils' learning that need to be plugged: Year 3 pupils struggled with the basic idea of a fraction being a part of a whole; and Year 5 and 6 pupils have a fragile understanding of analogue and digital time - they were hesitant when representing morning and evening times in the 24 hour clock format.

18. Standards in science are below national expectations. While pupils are steadily improving their scientific knowledge, their understanding of scientific concepts and their skills of enquiry are below average. In Year 6, pupils learn about the properties of light and its reflection, and in Year 4 they are making observations about how a shadow changes in relation to a moving light source. However, pupils do not talk confidently about their work and written presentation is weak, reflecting their literacy skills. Tasks that pupils undertake in lessons are sometimes mundane and lack challenge. Teachers do not give pupils suitable opportunities to devise, use and improve their own approaches to investigations. The science co-ordinator is newly appointed and is beginning to undertake a range of activities, including improving resources and monitoring planning, to ensure appropriate curriculum breadth.

19. Standards in other subjects show variation, generally reflecting the level of attention the school has been able to give to them, or the expertise and enthusiasm of individual teachers. There are some examples of good work in geography, history, and art, but also

some where achievement and standards are uneven, for example, in physical education and religious education.

20. The pupils' progress in learning is reflected in the improving standards. It was good in seven lessons, satisfactory in eight, and unsatisfactory in one. Weaknesses in teaching and gaps in learning, which have impeded progress in the past, have largely been overcome through recent staff changes and growing confidence in setting learning objectives which match the pupils' current needs. Many of the lessons contain interest and variety, and the pace of learning only slows when the content of the work is mundane or tasks are insufficiently explained so that the pupils are unsure of what to do next.

21. The pupils who have special educational needs make good progress and the work is matched accurately to their needs, particularly when they are taught individually or in specialist groups. The co-ordinator has revised all the procedures for identifying pupils with special needs, and has made a distinction between genuine special needs and those pupils who are merely underachieving as a result of previous indifferent teaching. The school now has a clear understanding of the types of support required and the appropriate learning strategies. Individual pupil profiles and plans identify both learning targets and suitable activities.

The pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

22. There has been a significant and rapid improvement in the pupils' attitudes to their work. They are attentive, keen to do well and generally interested in their tasks. They respond positively to encouragement and enjoy sharing their work with the teachers. Relationships at all levels are good and there are very few signs of the apathy and unhelpful responses displayed by a significant minority of pupils, especially in Key Stage 2, at the time of the May 2002 inspection. The pupils' behaviour is consistently good. They are polite and respectful and are appreciative of the care and concern shown to them by the staff.

23. The headteacher, newly appointed after the last inspection, has made a determined effort to raise both the profile of the school in the community and the pupils' self-esteem. One of the measures has been to establish a school motto: 'A happy school is a successful school'. The combination of rewarding good behaviour, valuing the pupils' work, encouraging their feeling of worth and spurring them on to attempt difficult tasks is paying off: the school is a happy school, and the context for it to be successful has been established. However there are still major problems with attendance. The latest figures, at 91 per cent, are well below nationally accepted levels and, although there has been a slight improvement during the current year, attendance remains unacceptably low. The school has tackled the problem in a number of ways, including a breakfast club, and a 'walk to school bus' when the headteacher and deputy headteacher go into the locality and pick up pupils at pre-arranged 'bus' stops. However, these measures have not resulted in sustained improvement.

24. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. The pupil's awareness of moral and social issues has improved in line with their behaviour and attitudes to work and school. The spiritual dimension to the pupils' development is principally through well-organised and planned assemblies which address both biblical teaching and moral and social themes. Links have been established with a local church, and the curate visits the school regularly.

The quality of education

25. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, with some examples of good teaching but also some lessons which have unsatisfactory features: the teaching was good in five lessons, satisfactory in ten, and unsatisfactory in one. This represents a considerable improvement since the inspection in 2002, although the quality of teaching lacks the level of consistency to which the school aspires.

26. After the inspection in May 2002, the headteacher, with local education authority (LEA) support, invested much time and energy addressing deep-seated weaknesses in the teaching, although the response proved to be disappointing. As a consequence, several teachers have left the school and the headteacher has been able to appoint new members to the staff team, although it is only since September 2003 that the school has experienced staffing stability. Nevertheless, there is a sense of cohesion developing, and a shared view about how to improve standards and address weaknesses in the learning. The teachers' planning is satisfactory and often good. Lesson plans are clear, yet detailed, and follow a common format. There is agreement about how to plan for the learning needs of different groups of pupils and the activities are almost always well matched to their various levels of attainment. The learning objectives are shared with the pupils at the beginning of the lesson and, in the best examples, referred to throughout the lesson to help teachers check on what has been achieved.

27. Overall, the management of time is efficient, although in some lessons the teachers spend too long introducing the work and leave too little time for the pupils to complete their tasks. At other times, the pupils suffer from being given mundane tasks, particularly in science and some of the foundation subjects, or have to complete worksheets which fail to interest them. Some lessons lack sparkle and pace because of an over-emphasis on teaching subject knowledge at the expense of using skills and techniques in practical contexts. Nevertheless, the strengths outweigh the weaknesses: the teachers give good opportunities for pupils to put forward their ideas and views; insist that they use vocabulary correctly; make good use of whiteboards and paired work; show good levels of subject knowledge in literacy and numeracy; and have good relationships with their pupils.

28. There is a large number of teaching assistants and voluntary helpers including parents, who support each class. They know the pupils well and are generally well briefed for each lesson. They are most effective when working with small groups of pupils, or managing resources, but less so during whole-class sessions or when there are too many adults. On these occasions it becomes difficult for the teacher to manage and organise them efficiently.

29. The management of assessment is improving and has significant strengths. An appropriate range of information is now available to measure pupils' progress in English and mathematics. All the pupils have challenging targets that relate to previous attainment. Regular discussions between the headteacher, class teacher and subject co-ordinators enable checks to be made on pupils' progress throughout the year. Teachers make sound links between assessment targets and curriculum planning and the impact of targets is monitored by the subject co-ordinators. There is now an expectation on teachers to evaluate and adapt their planning to meet the needs of the pupils. A newly introduced policy on marking provides a

suitable framework to ensure consistency between teachers, and ensures that pupils are provided with information about how well they are doing and what they need to do next.

30. The curriculum is broad and balanced, based on national guidance, and gives emphasis to raising the pupils' skills in literacy and numeracy. Much of the professional development has focused on improving the teachers' knowledge in these areas, although this has been at the expense of other subjects where skills are less assured. However, the school is beginning to address other aspects such as improving the quality of scientific investigations, using interactive whiteboards, and promoting cross-curricular writing.

31. The partnership between the school and parents and links with the community were relatively under developed at the time of the last inspection. The headteacher has worked hard to improve matters and is now experiencing a good measure of success after early setbacks and disappointing responses to new initiatives. The school aims to encourage parents to find out more about how it caters for their children's needs and provides opportunities for adult education either by working in class, or by setting up family learning initiatives. There has been a good mix of curricular and social events including an accredited course run by the headteacher entitled 'Supporting your child in the literacy hour', workshops, a mathematics morning, coffee mornings and newsletters.

Leadership and management

32. The leadership and management of the school are at least satisfactory and often good. The headteacher and deputy headteacher were appointed to the school shortly after the inspection in 2002 and made a determined start, analysing how best to set the school on the road to recovery. The headteacher has a clear view of what needs to be done and takes a firm lead in establishing priorities. The major priority remains to raise standards, and many of the initiatives have been linked to this objective. They include identifying curricular gaps and weaknesses in learning, providing a coherent set of assessment procedures, raising the profile of subject co-ordinators, promoting consistency in planning, and improving the general quality of the teaching. The headteacher has judged the pace of change well, although staffing difficulties have frequently impeded progress so that some of the measures have yet to take full effect on the quality of teaching and standards of attainment. Nevertheless, the relationships between assessment, target-setting and pupils' performance are now being reflected in the teachers' planning, and weaknesses in literacy, numeracy and science are being tackled.

33. The staffing difficulties, which until recently have dogged the school's progress, have now been resolved. Since September 2003 the school has had a settled staff team, including several new teachers who have brought new ideas and enthusiasms. The headteacher has encouraged them to share their skills, but within the context of a common whole-school framework.

34. The senior management team and subject co-ordinators have clearly defined roles. Each subject co-ordinator has developed a year-long action plan and is responsible for monitoring standards. The system works well and there are regular reviews of progress with the headteacher.

35. There have been several changes to the practice of monitoring teaching. Although the headteacher undertook regular lesson observations, improvements were slow to materialise and the causes of unsatisfactory practices were not always established. The current system works well, based on a pre-lesson meeting, elements of team-teaching, a thorough analysis of the teachers' performance, and rapid follow-up to ensure action points achieve success.

36. The LEA has given a good measure of support to the school in general and to the headteacher in particular. Regular visits by the linked inspector and consultants have supported the headteacher in resolving staffing issues and in curriculum development.

Implementation of the action plan

37. The inspection report of 2002 required the school to address six key issues. These principally related to: raising standards; improving the teaching; developing the senior management team; securing assessment procedures; improving relationships with parents; and raising the quality of pupils' spiritual development. Overall, reasonable progress has been made and most tasks have been completed, but there is still work to do.

38. The school has concentrated on raising standards in literacy and numeracy and has been successful in implementing the two national strategies, establishing gaps in learning, and monitoring progress. Half-termly topics linked to aspects of literacy and numeracy have proved successful. Improvements in science and ICT are less well advanced.

39. The quality of teaching has improved. New teachers have been appointed and a well-planned programme of professional development is in place. Regular monitoring of the teaching is effective.

40. The assessment co-ordinator has reviewed all the procedures and established an efficient and effective system which provides data on which teachers can plan work and set relevant learning targets for the pupils.

41. A wide range of measures to improve relationships with parents is having a slow, but increasingly beneficial, effect. The school provides a well-judged balance between social and educational initiatives. However, pupils' attendance remains a major problem to be resolved.

42. The pupils' spiritual development is soundly based. Daily assemblies are well planned and the teachers are encouraged to include references to spiritual development, where appropriate, in their lesson plans.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

The school was inspected under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors in May 2002. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school was visited by HMI in December 2002 and in April, May and November 2003 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of May 2002.

In March 2004, HMI returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Sixteen lessons or parts of lessons and two registration sessions were inspected. The pupils were observed at break and lunch times and samples of their work were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher and senior staff, and informal discussions were held with other staff and pupils. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was also taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of May 2002 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.

