



Inspection report

Washacre Primary School

**Better
education
and care**

Unique Reference Number 105199
LEA Bolton

Inspection number 275626
Inspection dates 22 and 23 June 2005
Reporting inspector Mr J Gornall HMI

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.

Type of School	Primary	School address	Clough Avenue
School category	Community		Westhoughton
			Bolton
Age range of pupils	3 to 11 years		BL5 2NJ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01942 813318
Number on roll	122	Fax number	01942 842165
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr G Twist
Date of previous inspection	January 2004	Headteacher	Miss L Mitchell

Age group	Published	Reference no.
3 to 11 years	2 September 2005	275626

Introduction

When Washacre Primary School was inspected in January 2004, it was judged to require special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education. Her Majesty's Inspectors of schools (HMI) subsequently visited the school on two occasions to monitor its progress, and reinspected the school in June 2005.

Description of the school

Washacre Primary School is situated in Westhoughton, a small community on the outskirts of Bolton. It serves an area of socio-economic disadvantage and is smaller than average. The pupils' attainment on entry to the school represents a broad span but, overall, is below average. Four per cent of the pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds and one has English as an additional language. Forty one per cent of the pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is more than twice the national average. About a third of the pupils have been identified as having special educational needs; this is above average. Two of the pupils have a Statement of Special Educational Need, which is broadly average. Since the time of the previous inspection in January 2004 the school has undergone significant change, including the appointment of a new headteacher and deputy headteacher. In April 2005 the local education authority (LEA) restored full delegated powers to the governing body.

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Overall effectiveness of the school

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.

Washacre Primary is a happy, friendly school that is providing a sound education for its pupils. Staff have higher expectations of what the pupils can and should be achieving than was the case at the time of the previous inspection. This is the result of the headteacher's incisive and purposeful leadership, the hard work of the teachers and a carefully focused programme of support from the LEA. As a consequence of teaching, which is at least satisfactory, often good and occasionally very good, and learning which is at least satisfactory, standards have risen. The legacy of past underachievement remains, particularly for older pupils, and the school still has some way to go to fully realise the pupils' potential. The quality of teaching is now similar to that found in most primary schools. The pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good and the school's positive ethos is a strength. The capacity of middle managers, including subject co-ordinators, to fulfil their responsibilities has developed considerably; they are making appropriate contributions, but their roles are not fully established. Attendance has risen and is satisfactory. There are sound procedures for assessing the pupils' progress across the school, but some of this work is new and, therefore, the impact at classroom level is underdeveloped. The curriculum meets national requirements and the pupils benefit from a good range of additional experiences through visiting artists and the provision of before and after-school clubs and activities.

Improvement since the last inspection

The inspection of January 2004 required the school to address areas for improvement concerned with: raising standards of attainment; improving the quality of teaching; using assessment information to plan a better curriculum; increasing the effectiveness of leadership and management; and ensuring the school meets statutory requirements by reporting pupil absences correctly. There has been good progress regarding leadership and management, the quality of teaching and ensuring statutory responsibilities are met. Reasonable progress has been made in raising standards and using assessment information to plan a better curriculum.

Capacity to improve

The school's capacity to improve is good. The headteacher has shown a determined approach to improving the quality of teaching and learning in order to raise standards; the leadership of the school has been well supported in this by the staff,

the interim project board, governors and the LEA. There is a thorough programme for monitoring the school's performance both from within the school and externally by the LEA, and indicators show an increasingly positive trend. This information is frequently and carefully analysed, informing decisions about the allocation of extra support and resources, and setting the priorities within the school's strategic plans. There are good procedures for recruiting staff and the school is clear about its priorities. Improved systems for monitoring the school's progress, and appropriate training, have strengthened governance; the governors are well placed to hold the school to account. Very good transitional arrangements have been put in place to ensure that the work of the interim project board will continue through the committees of the reconstituted governing body. Through this and other work, the LEA intends to continue its intensive support for the school for the remainder of this year.

What the school should do to improve further

The key priorities for the school's development plan are to:

- continue to raise standards;
- further develop the role of middle managers, including subject co-ordinators, to enable the school to better evaluate its own effectiveness;
- further develop the use of assessment, particularly in lessons.

Achievement and standards

The attainment of the pupils when they first start at the school is below average, particularly in language skills. Their underdeveloped language skills were particularly noticeable in those pupils who had only recently joined the nursery class. The pupils make good progress in all areas of learning in the Foundation Stage, and approximately three quarters reach the standards expected for five-year-olds and a small number exceed these. The pupils in the nursery and reception classes make particularly effective progress in their personal, social and emotional development and in the acquisition of communication skills. In the nursery class, they talked about their activities, describing characters and actions when taking part in role play. One boy explained that he was the 'lollipop man' stopping the cars to let the children cross. Others could explain their reasons for choosing certain activities and what they were doing, for example, cleaning the wheeled toys at the role play car wash. In the reception class, the pupils have grown considerably in their confidence to communicate with each other and with adults. They spell unfamiliar words in phonetically plausible ways. In one lesson, the pupils described the materials a

manufacturer had used to make a skateboard and suggested ways that it had been constructed. The higher-attaining pupils wrote legible and correctly formed letters to produce short and accurate phrases.

The number of pupils in each year group is smaller than in most primary schools and caution needs to be exercised when interpreting National Curriculum test results. At Key Stage 1, the school's results for 2005 show an improvement on the previous year's figures in all subject areas. In 2005 the proportion of pupils achieving the nationally expected Level 2 was below the most recent national figure in reading and writing but close to it in mathematics. The proportion of pupils gaining the higher Level 3 in 2005 showed an increase on the previous year in all subjects and was well above the previous national figure in mathematics. A feature of the school's 2005 performance is that it is now doing significantly better when its results are compared to the most recently available scores for similar schools. In lessons, standards varied but overall were in line with expectations for the pupils' ages.

At Key Stage 2, the results in the 2005 national tests were not available. The school's own assessment records, however, indicate a marked improvement in the proportion of pupils expected to gain the nationally expected Level 4 in mathematics, with slight increases in English and science. These predicted results are likely to place the school below the average for all schools nationally in English and science but broadly in line in mathematics. In lessons standards varied but, overall, were generally in line with expectations for the pupils' ages.

As a consequence of improved teaching the pupils' progress in the Foundation Stage and Key Stages 1 and 2 is at least satisfactory and often good. Progress in Key Stage 2 has improved significantly in comparison with that reported at the previous inspection. The work in the pupils' books and the school's own tracking of progress indicate that the rate of learning across the school is accelerating. When teaching was good or better, the pupils made correspondingly stronger progress because the vast majority of the pupils were keen to learn. Nevertheless, progress was impaired at times by shortfalls in the pupils' prior learning, due to weaknesses in past provision.

The progress of the pupils who have special educational needs was satisfactory in lessons. Learning support assistants were well directed by teaching staff and made a valuable contribution. Individual education plans for those pupils who have special educational needs are of sound quality. The school has begun a review to rationalise its register of pupils who require special educational needs.

Personal development

The personal development of the pupils is good; it is given a high priority and all aspects are promoted well; this contributes significantly to the school's positive

ethos which is a particular strength. The school has a consistent approach to managing pupils' behaviour within a climate of friendliness and mutual respect; as a result the pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good. The pupils behaved very well in lessons, in assemblies and around the school at break and lunchtimes. Movement around the school was very well ordered and the pupils treated their environment with care. They settled quickly to their work in lessons and, when opportunities arose, they worked well with others in pairs and groups. The pupils are responding well to improved teaching and, where tasks are interesting and provide challenge, they are very enthusiastic and keen to learn. There are no reported incidents of bullying. A few of the pupils with specific behavioural needs are supported well by a team of effective learning support assistants. Only one pupil has been temporarily excluded this year.

Attitudes to learning are good. There is strong respect between pupils and teachers and relationships are mutually supportive. Very young pupils learn to be independent quickly and they enjoy school. The pupils learn to take responsibility and exercise this well, as shown by decisions taken in the school council meetings; for example, it was the pupils' decision to refurbish the nurture room to provide a cheerful, calming area for quiet reflection. The school provides good opportunities for collaborative work in lessons which enhances the learning of all pupils.

Provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good; for their cultural development it is satisfactory. Assemblies effectively promote a strong sense of self-worth and enhance feelings of spirituality through well-timed moments of reflection and prayer. A group of Year 2 pupils chose assemblies as one of their three favourite and most enjoyable aspects of school life. A number of the pupils commented positively on the social aspects of coming together as a whole school; they see it as a 'family' occasion. There are several displays with a Christian theme that reinforce the school's values. There is a good range of pre and post-school activities, which encourage good social development among the pupils. The pre-school breakfast club, for example, is very well attended and is a strong social occasion for the pupils. The pupils work and play well together. Cultural understanding is satisfactorily promoted through personal, health, social and citizenship education and religious education, but the school is aware that this is an area that needs further development. Practical steps are taken to foster a healthy lifestyle. Pupils spoke favourably of the healthy snacks and the salad bar at lunchtimes. They have a good understanding of the consequences of a lack of exercise and overeating.

The rate of pupils' attendance is satisfactory; it has improved since the inspection in 2004 and is in line with national figures. Strategies to promote good attendance and punctuality have been reviewed and effectively updated. Good attendance is celebrated in classes and in assemblies. Patterns of attendance are systematically

monitored and appropriate action is taken where necessary. The pupils enjoy coming to school and punctuality is good. Little time is lost during the school day.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching has improved; it is at least satisfactory, often good and occasionally very good. At the inspection in 2004, 17 per cent of the teaching was unsatisfactory and only a small proportion was good or very good. In this inspection, all the lessons were satisfactory or better, and three quarters were good or very good. The significant weaknesses in Key Stage 2, reported during the January 2004 inspection, have been eradicated. Changes to staffing have supported the better teaching profile. The school's sustained efforts to improve the quality of teaching have achieved a better consistency across year groups, which has begun to eliminate the uneven progress characteristic of previous years. Where teaching was satisfactory, there were more strengths than weaknesses. Lessons overall were well planned, prepared and organised, and the intended learning outcomes were shared with the pupils from the start. The teachers' questioning was effective and there was a good focus on developing speaking and listening skills. There was a sensible balance between teacher exposition and the time provided for the pupils to engage in tasks and activities. Methods were varied, and often involved practical activities which helped the pupils to apply what they had learned and deepen their understanding; for example, through games and competitive work in groups during mathematics lessons.

In the best lessons, the teachers were enthusiastic, had a good knowledge of their subject, their classroom management was strong and the pupils were encouraged to take an active part in learning. The teachers had high expectations; they exemplified and modelled the standards they wanted, and were vigilant about the pupils' work rate. By using well-focused questioning and requiring the pupils to demonstrate what they had learned, the teachers carefully ensured that everyone was fully involved. In group activities, work was particularly well matched to the pupils' prior attainment. Good use was made of information and communication technology during lessons. In the reception class, for example, digital photographs taken during activities to build a skateboard and were loaded quickly to a computer to form part of an effective summary at the end of the lesson.

Where teaching was just satisfactory, a few weaker elements remained. These mainly relate to the appropriateness and level of challenge for particular groups within the class. What the pupils were to actually learn or be able to do by the end of the lesson was not always clearly demonstrated to take into account the broad span of pupils' prior attainment. As a consequence, some of the tasks did not challenge the pupils sufficiently. There is also some evidence of this mismatch between prior attainment and the level of challenge in some of the pupils' books.

The curriculum is satisfactory. The school is exploring ways of enhancing the curriculum to foster more adventurous and creative teaching. Imaginative displays of good quality enhance the learning environment. A review of units of work in the foundation subjects is under way. There is a comprehensive procedure to check coverage and understanding of the curriculum through end-of-unit assessments. This also serves to check progression through subject-specific skills. Assessment and tracking information has been used effectively to identify groups of pupils in need of additional support in literacy and numeracy. The support begins in Year 3 and comprises small group work with special needs assistants, including the introduction of spelling programmes and other activities. Recent initiatives are successfully enriching the curriculum, for example a circus week and an architecture week have contributed well to broadening links with the community. A satisfactory range of out-of-school activities such as clubs for Spanish, art and design and sports are run with the assistance of a parent. Year 6 pupils enjoyed the way their literacy and numeracy work was linked to an art and design topic because the work was within an interesting context. The provision of appropriate homework to enhance the curriculum is a regular feature throughout the school; it is marked conscientiously. There are appropriate procedures for child protection.

Assessment procedures have improved but remain an underdeveloped area of the school's work. Nonetheless, there is a comprehensive assessment scheme that provides information on the progress of individual learners. This includes data from National Curriculum assessments, tests and teacher assessments and this has been collated to form the basis for the setting of improvement targets for the pupils. This information is beginning to be used well to identify those pupils who are achieving well and those who may require additional help, but the full potential of the system has yet to be realised. The introduction of a marking scheme is beginning to have an impact on learning because the pupils are better informed about how to improve their work. However, the use of the policy is inconsistent. It is used effectively in some classes where pupils are given clear guidance on what to do to move forward and appropriate targets are set. Individualised and imaginative tracking charts, displayed in every classroom, provide the pupils with a visual reminder of how well they are doing and this encourages them to take some responsibility for their own progress.

Links with parents and the community are satisfactory. The school is exploring ways that this might be further enhanced. Opportunities for the parents to visit school are provided on a weekly basis so that they can discuss their child's education. There is an effective parent-teacher association that raises funds for the school. Parents occasionally help in classes and they regularly support the breakfast club and other activities.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good. The leadership of the headteacher is very good; with enthusiasm and commitment, she has provided clarity of educational direction, the implementation of effective systems required to achieve improvement and the training needed to establish these successfully. As a consequence, a reinvigorated staff has worked hard to introduce the required changes. The deputy headteacher, who joined the school earlier this year, has strengthened the leadership and management of the school. The management structure promotes effective communication both within and between year groups and key stages; this has resulted in far greater consistency of provision than was the case at the previous inspection. The school's strategic planning is based on the priorities arising from its rigorous monitoring and evaluation procedures. The planning process is highly responsive to the school's changing needs. The role of the subject co-ordinators has developed substantially; they are contributing appropriately to reviews of progress in their subjects and to plans for future improvements. Their roles, and that of the deputy headteacher, however, are not yet fully established, with the result that too much of the evaluation of effectiveness rests with the headteacher.

Governors have worked well with the LEA's interim project board and this has prepared them for the restoration of full delegated powers. The chair of governors is very supportive of the headteacher and staff and maintains a close link with the school. He is knowledgeable about what needs to be done to improve the school's effectiveness, but is also keen to ensure the governors' committee structure develops its own identity and accountability. As a consequence of regular visits and informative briefing sessions with a specific focus from school staff and the LEA, the governors are well informed about the school's progress. Strengthened membership, a revised committee structure and relevant training have enabled the governing body to develop its role as a critical friend to the school.

The LEA's overall support for the school has been very good. It has been highly responsive to the school's needs in providing a range of effective and well-timed help. This has included: ensuring continuity in the school's leadership; monitoring the quality of teaching and learning; evaluating the school's progress against its action plan; and assisting subject co-ordinators and other managers to develop the skills required to fulfil their roles. Specialist support from consultants, including developing aspects of literacy, numeracy and the provision for early years, has been well received by staff. Monitoring reports following the LEA's visits are detailed and informative. The LEA's support for governors has been highly effective, particularly in providing experienced staff to offer advice and guidance at meetings and in support of the new committee structure.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

Washacre Primary School was inspected under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors in January 2004. 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 October 2004 and in February 2005 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of January 2004.

In June 2005, an HMI and an Additional Inspector 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.

Twelve lessons or part lessons and two assemblies were inspected. The pupils' conduct was observed around the school and on the playground at break and lunchtimes, and samples of their work were inspected. Discussions were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, key senior staff and the chair of governors, and informally with other staff. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was 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 the areas for improvement in the inspection report of January 2004 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those issues.

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