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education
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Inspection report

Cromwell Junior and Infant School

Unique Reference Number 103191
LEA Birmingham

Inspection number 275652
Inspection dates 15 and 16 June 2005
Reporting inspector Mrs D Holdaway 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	Cromwell Street
School category	Community		Birmingham
			West Midlands
Age range of pupils	3 to 11 years		B7 5BA
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0121 359 1012
Number on roll	215	Fax number	0121 333 6705
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs G Gaine
Date of previous inspection	March 2005	Headteacher	Mr D Slinn

Age group	Published	Reference no.
3 to 11 years	19 July 2005	275652

Introduction

When Cromwell Junior and Infant School was inspected in October 2003, 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 five occasions to monitor its progress, and reinspected the school in June 2005.

Description of the school

Cromwell Junior and Infant School is situated in the Nechells Ward of the city of Birmingham. There are 215 pupils on roll, of which 128 speak English as an additional language. The pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds, including from families who were refugee and or asylum seekers. The socio-economic circumstances of the area are very poor: 76 per cent of the pupils are entitled to a free school meal, which is well above the national average. The pupils' attainment on entry to the school is well below average. Twenty seven per cent of the pupils have been identified as having special educational needs, which is well above average. Three pupils have Statements of Special Educational Need.

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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.

Cromwell Junior and Infant School has effectively tackled its weaknesses and is an improving school, which is well led and managed. The headteacher and deputy headteacher have worked together closely to improve the quality of teaching and raise standards of attainment. There are effective procedures for planning, implementing and reviewing the school's work. Standards of attainment have improved, although the results of the 2004 national tests in both Key Stages 1 and 2 remained below the national figures. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall, although there were examples of very good and excellent teaching in Key Stage 2. The pupils rely heavily on adult support and intervention; they do not have sufficient opportunities to develop their own independent learning skills. The pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good. The curriculum is sufficiently broad but subjects are not balanced effectively over time, limiting the range of skills taught across the curriculum.

Improvement since the last inspection

The inspection of October 2003 required the school to address key issues concerned with leadership and management, the curriculum, raising standards, improving the provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language, the role of the governing body and attendance. There has been satisfactory progress in raising standards and improving attendance and good progress in the remaining key issues. However, standards remain too low.

Capacity to improve

The school's capacity to improve is good. The headteacher is committed to a programme of further improvements and, together with the leadership team, provides a strong sense of direction and purpose. All staff, and a representative from the governing body, worked together to draft the new school improvement plan. Appropriate priorities have been identified and the leadership team, together with key co-ordinators, has begun shaping the vision, values and principles for the school's future. Thorough and regular monitoring has informed key staff about the school's strengths and weaknesses. Intervention programmes and relevant support have been implemented to tackle underachievement. The school has suffered from a prolonged period of unstable staffing and long-term absences. However, the present staff have developed into a highly motivated and capable team, determined to secure continuous improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

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

- raise standards in all subjects;
- develop a broad and balanced curriculum which ensures progression and continuity;
- develop the pupils' learning skills by increasing their independence and building more opportunities for purposeful, collaborative work.

Achievement and standards

At the end of Key Stage 1, standards of attainment in the 2004 national tests remained below the national figures. None of the pupils gained the higher Level 3 in writing. When compared with similar schools, the results in reading were average, and above average in mathematics. The school's monitoring suggests that the 2005 test results will remain below national figures. However, almost a third of the Year 2 pupils were new to the school in September and did not speak English as their first language. The school's assessments indicate that the remaining Year 2 pupils will achieve the expected Level 2. The end-of-Key Stage 2 national test results improved in 2004. Nevertheless, the results were well below the national figures.

The pupils' attainment on entry to the Foundation Stage is well below average. Many of the pupils do not speak English as their first language and others have poor speaking and listening skills. By the end of the reception year the pupils read simple texts; write legible letters grouped together as words; recognise and name letters; and listen to stories with enjoyment and understanding. The higher attaining pupils write their ideas in short sentences with full stops and capital letters.

Standards in lessons were below average in most subjects but were close to expectations when the teachers inspired the pupils' interest with imaginative activities, and structured their learning over a number of lessons. The Year 6 pupils collected and displayed words and definitions that interested them. As a consequence, their discussions were rich with descriptive and expressive language, which helped them to pursue complex ideas and concepts. Spelling games inspired a love of words in the pupils; they proudly demonstrated their ability to spell words such as bilingual, transatlantic and xenophobia. However, the pupils did not transfer their oral skills confidently to other subjects such as personal, social and health education. In writing, the pupils benefited from sharing ideas, planning information and drafting their work a number of times. Writing in Years 5 and 6 was well presented and included a range of forms, sustained ideas, accurate spelling and a variety of punctuation marks. Year 5 pupils organised their letter writing into paragraphs and used persuasive language convincingly.

The pupils often made good progress in lessons, although there were significant gaps in their knowledge and skills because of unsatisfactory learning in the past. The quality of learning was at least satisfactory and often good. The pupils were eager to respond to questions and contribute ideas, solutions or explanations. They learned most effectively when they were challenged, confident and motivated to succeed. The older pupils' knowledge of National Curriculum levels enabled them to discuss their work meaningfully with the teachers. Their self-evaluations were accurate and they were keen to improve.

Personal development

The pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good. School rules, rewards and sanctions are applied and reinforced consistently. The school works hard to overcome early signs of disaffection by emphasising positive approaches to work and developing good social skills. When teaching inspired the pupils, their attitudes and behaviour were exemplary. Adults establish very good relationships with the pupils and encourage mutual respect. There were 18 fixed-term and one permanent exclusion, involving six pupils.

Attendance is below the national figure at 93 per cent and is unsatisfactory. The school has implemented rigorous strategies to improve attendance and links with external agencies are effective. Punctuality has improved, but there are still too many late arrivals at the beginning of the school day.

The school promotes healthy eating successfully. School meals include a good range of fresh meat, fruit and vegetables and choices that conform to religious rules. The breakfast club is well attended and provides a nourishing start to the day.

The provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. A multi-faith approach to assemblies values the major world religions, traditions and celebrations, but neither of the observed assemblies included a prayer or time for reflection. The pupils' singing was tuneful and enthusiastic. Photographs, posters and artefacts used in assemblies were left on display throughout the day, encouraging the pupils to investigate further. The pupils' cultural development is enriched by their shared experiences from home countries. However, cultural aspects are not represented in displays of art and design around the school.

Residential visits help to increase the pupils' capacity for team work. This was particularly evident in one outstanding lesson, when the oldest pupils worked collaboratively and shared group tasks to achieve an objective. However, pupils of all ages generally find it difficult to work independently or to take responsibility for their own learning.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching was at least satisfactory in all lessons. The teaching was good or better in over half of the lessons. Very good and excellent teaching was seen in Key Stage 2. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection, when the quality of

teaching was judged to be poor. The teaching and non-teaching staff are highly motivated, hard working and keen to improve.

The lessons were well organised and the teachers' expectations were sufficiently high to ensure that the pupils were challenged appropriately. Activities were frequently supported with practical resources and photographs, so that the pupils' concepts and language developed from first-hand experiences. This practice was particularly effective for those pupils who spoke English as an additional language. These pupils also benefited from working with bilingual peers so they could discuss ideas and deepen their understanding.

In the very good lessons, the teachers focused on clear skills and outcomes; questions of varying degrees of complexity were directed at named pupils; activities were challenging but pitched accurately at the pupils' abilities so they could achieve and experience success; imaginative methods engaged the pupils' interest; and positive relationships supported the pupils' growing self-esteem and confidence. Creative experiences such as role-play, hot-seating and the 'conscience alley' deepened understanding so that the pupils expressed their views on ethical issues and developed responsible and reasoned questions on moral dilemmas. For example, Year 6 pupils interviewed a teaching assistant in the role of Lady Macbeth and asked, 'Why are you possessed with such evil?' and 'What do you think you have accomplished by this mayhem?'

Systems for tracking the progress of individual pupils enable senior managers to analyse results and implement appropriate programmes of support. Targets are set at the beginning of each year, although some lack clarity and precision. Day-to-day assessments inform planning and activities were provided for the pupils at appropriate levels. A higher attaining Year 2 pupil joined Year 4 mathematics lessons and worked confidently alongside the older pupils.

Marking is generally of a high standard. The best examples provided detailed feedback so that the pupils knew how to improve their work and correct weaknesses. Marking was closely linked to the National Curriculum levels and enabled the pupils to gauge their progress.

Classroom displays, including a 'working wall' were informative and well organised. During lessons, the teachers did not use displays as a resource or reference and, as a consequence, the pupils relied heavily on adult support and intervention. The 'working wall' helped the pupils to appreciate that learning developed over a period of time.

The school has focused on raising standards in English and mathematics at the cost of a broad and balanced curriculum. The leadership team and co-ordinators have identified weakness in the management and organisation of the curriculum, agreed their goals and aspirations and prioritised steps towards improvement. The curriculum is enhanced by a range of lunchtime and after-school activities. Educational visits and specialist visitors in school enrich the learning experiences for the pupils.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the school are good. The headteacher provides a purposeful sense of direction, which is clearly linked to school improvement. There are unambiguous lines of responsibility and the staff understand their roles in achieving the school's goals. The leadership team, supported by governors and advisers, has monitored lessons and standards closely. Areas for development have been acted upon effectively; for example, in the Foundation Stage, where planning and organisation have improved significantly since the last inspection. There is a united and determined commitment to raise standards by developing and shaping the necessary initiatives and continuing to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Unsatisfactory teaching has been challenged appropriately and eradicated successfully.

Co-ordinators lead curriculum developments confidently and enthusiastically. In the main, they lead by good example and take responsibility for the development of their subjects throughout the school. They have a good understanding for the standards achieved in school, particularly at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2; they anticipate barriers to their success; and introduce appropriate initiatives to reduce underachievement. Their increased confidence has led to more creative approaches and less dependency on published materials.

Almost all vacancies on the governing body have been filled. Suitable committee structures are in place with appropriate terms of reference, which are reviewed annually. The chair and vice-chair of governors have a clear view of the school's relative strengths and weaknesses. Individual governors have responsibility for subject areas and many have partnered classes. A plan to reduce the school's budget deficit has been agreed with the local education authority (LEA).

Appendix – Information about the inspection

Cromwell Junior and Infant School was inspected under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors in October 2003. 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 March, June and November 2004 and in March 2005 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of October 2003.

In June 2005, one HMI and one 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.

Twenty lessons or parts of lessons 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 leadership team, co-ordinators, the chair of governors, a representative from the LEA 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 key issues for improvement in the inspection report of October 2003 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.

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