



Alumwell Junior School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 104142
LEA Walsall
Inspection number 277083
Inspection dates 15 March 2006 to 16 March 2006
Reporting inspector Paul Edwards AI

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

Type of school	Junior	School address	Primley Avenue
School category	Community		Walsall
Age range of pupils	7 to 11		West Midlands WS2 9UP
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01922 721391
Number on roll	349	Fax number	01922 721371
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs L Jenkins
Date of previous inspection	3 April 2000	Headteacher	Mr M C Vlahakis

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Alumwell is a large junior school serving an area in which there is significant social and economic disadvantage. About half the pupils are of White British heritage and others are from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. Many pupils are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. Although the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is lower than in most junior schools, attainment on entry is below average and is particularly weak in writing.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school judges itself to be good overall and inspection evidence endorses this view. The school is very welcoming and pupils are well cared for. The quality of teaching is good in all years. As a result, pupils achieve well in English and mathematics and reach standards that are broadly average by the end of Year 6. Although teaching is good overall, teachers' marking does not always identify how pupils might improve their work. Pupils are not sufficiently involved in assessing their own work to help them to make progress. Pupils' achievement is not as good in science as it is in English and mathematics because the more able are not always challenged to do as well as they should.

The school gives high priority to pupils' personal and social development. It is successful in this and, as a result, pupils' personal development is outstanding. Pupils enjoy school a good deal and behave exceptionally well. Leadership and management are good and have been effective in improving pupils' progress and raising the standards in English and mathematics. The school recognises there is a little way to go in science and is taking action to achieve this.

The school provides good value for money and has improved well since the last inspection. The effective strategies for raising standards and the accurate identification of future priorities demonstrate the school's capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further raise standards in science, and particularly improve the progress of the more able by ensuring that all pupils are challenged to do as well as they should.
- Develop the quality of teachers' marking so that pupils are given clear guidance about what they need to do next to improve their work.
- Develop the procedures for pupils to assess their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The pupils' achievement is good. They make good progress, particularly in writing, and by the end of Year 6 standards are broadly average in English and mathematics. Standards have improved steadily over the last few years. The good achievement in these subjects is as a result of the consistently good quality of teaching and effective procedures for grouping pupils in lessons according to their prior attainment.

There are signs of improving standards in science, but they remain below average overall because too few pupils reach the higher levels. Although recently introduced strategies for raising standards in science are beginning to show results in the standard of pupils' school work in Year 6, they are not yet consistent throughout the school in ensuring that the more able do as well as they should. Challenging targets are set for the pupils' performance in national tests and these were exceeded in both English and mathematics in 2005.

Pupils from minority ethnic groups are represented in all ability groups and achieve as well as their classmates. The school tracks the progress of all pupils effectively and provides additional support where the level of need is greatest, including for those at an early stage of learning English. Pupils with learning difficulties achieve well because of the early identification of their needs and the good level and quality of support.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. Pupils enjoy school, love learning and show very positive attitudes. They settle quickly and respond enthusiastically to all that they are asked to do, showing determined persistence even when facing difficult tasks. They form excellent relationships and are sensitive to the needs of others. Attendance is satisfactory and most pupils attend regularly, not wanting to miss out on the 'really interesting and fun' things that school provides. The attendance rate has crept up in recent years, although, despite the school's best efforts, it was still a little below the national average last year as a result of a small number of families taking extended holidays during term time.

Pupils respond very maturely to opportunities to take responsibility. The school council is well organised and shows real initiative, as seen in the organisation of a 'toast club' to raise funds for play equipment and to subsidise school trips. Pupils who take on responsibility as 'safety officers' ensure orderly movement around school and contribute significantly to the high standards of behaviour. Pupils are very aware of their role in the wider community and, for example, raise funds for many charitable causes.

The pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is reflected, for example, in how well pupils from different cultural backgrounds get on together. Pupils are also very aware of the need for a healthy diet and regular physical activity. They follow safe practices well, such as in practical lessons. Their very good work habits and their willingness to work hard and achieve well in their language and mathematics promise well for their future success.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils' good achievement results from effective teaching and careful attention to their differing needs in English and mathematics. Classrooms are inviting with displays that celebrate pupils' successes and promote learning well. The good relationships between all staff and pupils encourage pupils to work hard but also to seek help with confidence when unsure about an aspect of their work. Pupils know that their efforts are valued by everyone who works with them, including parents who are encouraged to take an active part in their children's education.

Teachers give pupils good opportunities to work together and to develop skills in learning independently, such as through focused research. They present lively lessons making very effective use of information and communication technology (ICT). As a result, explanations are very clear to follow and pupils are well motivated. In an outstanding mathematics lesson in Year 6, for example, high challenge, brisk pace, and skilful and probing questioning enabled all pupils to make very good gains in their learning.

Pupils who need additional help are guided sensitively so they achieve well. However, the more able pupils are not always challenged sufficiently in science. Teachers are beginning to involve pupils in assessing their own work but this is still at an early stage of development. Marking is satisfactory but varies in its effectiveness. Sometimes it provides too little guidance as to why work is good or how pupils could make improvements.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and addresses most pupils' needs well. In particular, it helps pupils to make good progress in English and mathematics. The school has identified a need to challenge more able pupils in science and whilst this has been addressed well in Year 6, the impact of new strategies is not yet seen throughout the school. Pupils in all year groups describe the work they do in the different subjects as 'fun and interesting' and this enables them to make good progress in most aspects of their learning.

The range of extra curricular activities, including residential and local visits, is good and enhances learning effectively. The choir rightly has a high reputation and a large number of pupils who have moved on to secondary school return for choir practice and to take part in performances. Year 5 pupils have the opportunity to learn French and this is an area that the school is developing well. Visitors to school support and enrich learning well, for example theatre groups and musicians. Provision for ICT has improved well since the last inspection and is now good and used well to support learning across the subjects. Pupils' writing develops well because of the good opportunities they have to practise their writing skills in other subjects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Good care, guidance and support for pupils result in them feeling well looked after. Parents agree that their children are cared for well. The promotion of healthy eating, regular exercise and safety procedures is good. Child protection and welfare arrangements are thorough and staff are well trained. Proper arrangements are in place for Internet security and for vetting adults who work with pupils.

There is good guidance and support to promote pupils' personal development and welfare. The outcomes are evident in pupils' outstanding personal development and exceptionally good behaviour. Pupils with learning difficulties are supported well.

Expectations of behaviour are made very clear and the school monitors the frequency of inappropriate behaviour well, including any racially motivated incidents. Members of staff treat pupils with respect and gain their full trust.

The school works well with parents and other agencies to ensure that learners make good progress in their personal development and school work. Effective links with outside agencies ensure that vulnerable pupils are supported very well.

There is good practice in involving pupils in assessing their work in some classes, but this is not yet consistent across the school. Marking of pupils' work does not always provide them with sufficient guidance as to how they might improve. As a result, pupils do not always know clearly enough what they have done well and what they need to do next to make better progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher, who has been in post only since January, has correctly identified the school's strengths and weaknesses and is building on the previous good practice. There are clear systems in place to raise standards further in English and mathematics. The effectiveness of these strategies is seen in the improved results. The school has rightly identified that more work needs to be undertaken to raise standards in science. It knows that the effective practice in some classes needs to be implemented throughout the school to ensure that pupils of all abilities, including the more able, are challenged well. A start has been made on ensuring that these developments take place.

Parents are consulted regularly and data from questionnaires are used to address issues of concern and to plan curriculum meetings. Pupils are also consulted regularly through the school council. Their views are taken seriously and acted upon, for example in the provision of more exciting playground facilities. The governors support the school well, fulfilling all of their statutory duties.

Good use is made of tracking and monitoring systems to ensure pupils from different ability groups and backgrounds achieve as well as they should. The school is not complacent and staff are keen to try new methods to raise pupils' achievement further. For example, the employment of additional learning support staff to enhance the achievement of pupils with learning difficulties has been very effective. The establishment of the post of 'learning mentor' has been a significant factor in improving pupils' behaviour and attitudes to the current high standards. Given the school's good progress since the last inspection and the successful identification of present improvement priorities, the school has the necessary capacity to improve further.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Dear Pupils

Thank you very much for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school. We found your school to be a very friendly and happy place. These are the really good things that we found:

- You enjoy coming to school and being with your friends.
- You try extremely hard to do your best.
- You behave exceptionally well and are very friendly and kind to each other.
- You like to take responsibility, for example the 'toast club' and safety patrols.
- The adults work hard to keep you safe and healthy.
- You are making good progress in English and mathematics.

These are the things that would make your school even better:

- Make sure you all do as well as you can in your science by the time you leave school.
- Make sure that when teachers mark your work they tell you how you might improve it next time.
- Develop the ways in which you can become more involved in assessing your own work.

We are glad that you enjoy school and wish you all the best for the future.

Thank you again for helping us with our work.

Yours faithfully

Paul Edwards Lead Inspector