



Blackwood School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 104211
LEA Walsall
Inspection number 277101
Inspection dates 14 September 2005 to 15 September 2005
Reporting inspector John Eadie RISP

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

Type of school	Junior	School address	Blackwood Road
School category	Community		Streetly
Age range of pupils	3 to 11		Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands B74 3PH
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0121 353 1876
Number on roll	584	Fax number	0121 380 9569
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr R Sugden
Date of previous inspection	28 March 2000	Headteacher	Mr Paul Hough

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors

Description of the school

Blackwood School is a large primary school with 586 pupils from the ages of 3 to 11 years and is situated in Streetly, an area on the outskirts of Walsall. Unemployment is very low in the area and very few pupils are eligible for free school meals. When they start school children have levels of skills and knowledge above those expected for their age. There is an increasing number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, who comprise nearly 12 per cent of the number on roll. These pupils are from a wide variety of ethnic groups, though more than half are of Asian heritage. About a third of the minority ethnic pupils speak English as an additional language, though none of them are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is lower than average. Nearly all pupils spend the whole of their primary education at the school. A number of new staff appointments have been made recently and both the headteacher and the deputy have been in post for less than a year. The school was awarded a Quality Mark in 2002 for building pupils' basic skills and an Activemark in 2004 for encouraging pupils in an active lifestyle.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school where the pupils make good progress. They achieve well above average standards, though standards of writing are not quite as good as other aspects of English. Teaching and learning are good across the school. However, marking does not always help pupils to see what it is that they need to do to improve their work. This is partly because the targets set for pupils are not sufficiently specific and they are not clear about how to improve their work. These areas for continuing improvement have already been identified by the school and plans have been put in place to deal with them.

Leadership and management are very effective in raising achievement and supporting learners. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and gives very clear direction to the work of the school. The views of pupils and parents are taken into account regularly and many of the recent initiatives have been as a result of these consultations. Pupils' personal development is a strength and is supported by the school's caring and inclusive ethos, where the needs of each individual are fully taken into account. The harmonious relationships between all pupils, including the few pupils from minority ethnic groups, show how well pupils are being prepared for citizenship in today's multi-cultural society.

There have been significant improvements in the school since its previous inspection that have resulted in well-above-average standards being maintained and all shortcomings flagged then remedied. The school has highly effective systems of self-evaluation that enable a very clear view of its strengths and weaknesses. This, combined with the vision and drive of the senior managers, places the school in an excellent position for sustaining future development. The school is very efficient and effective in deploying resources and achieves good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make each pupil's targets more precise so that they know exactly what they need to do to improve their work and ensure that teachers' marking is linked closely to assessing how well pupils are meeting their targets.
- Press ahead with the work to raise standards of writing, particularly for more able pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards have been well above average for some years. On joining the school in the nursery, most children have levels of skills and knowledge above those normally expected for their age. They make good progress in the nursery and reception classes to exceed the standards expected by the time they transfer to Year 1. Pupils of all abilities continue to make good progress in Years 1 and 2 and by the end of Year 2, standards are well above average in reading and mathematics. Standards in writing

are not quite as positive as the other two subjects as relatively fewer pupils reach the higher Level 3 standard. Pupils sustain good progress in Years 3 to 6 and standards are well above average by the end of Year 6 in English, mathematics and science. Well over half of the pupils achieve the higher Level 5 in the national tests in all three subjects. The small number of pupils from minority ethnic groups are represented in all ability groups and make similar progress to others in the group. Pupils with special educational needs are well catered for and make progress similar to their classmates.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well-being of pupils is good. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is also good. Learners are particularly mature socially and are helped to think deeply about issues that affect them and their relationships with others. Pupils have a well-balanced appreciation of the rich variety of people living in modern British society. Pupils behave very well, enjoy school and take care of others. They also concentrate hard in lessons and feel that they are doing well. The "I am proud of being me" books are a delight to read. Attendance is good. Outstanding encouragement is given to pupils to know how to keep healthy and safe, from the drinking water in class that helps them keep alert, to the changes pupils say that they have made to the amount of exercise they are taking and their food choices to provide a balanced diet. Learners express a keen interest in a wide range of subjects, especially information and communication technology, which will help them in their future choices and careers. They are encouraged to take part in the work of the school and community, helping substantially with the new play area, holding elections for membership of the school council and raising significant funds to support a range of charities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good and consequently pupils make good progress and achieve well. Teachers' good subject knowledge, especially in mathematics, contributes to the high standards reached by many pupils. More able pupils are challenged effectively except occasionally in writing. Pupils with special educational needs do well because work for them is planned carefully and they are given good support. There are good procedures for assessing children's attainment and progress in the nursery. There are also some useful initiatives which help pupils to understand what they need to do to move forward, for example, the pictorial chart displayed in all classrooms which highlights the punctuation marks needed in writing to reach each National Curriculum level. However, in the main, pupils are not sufficiently clear about what they need to do to improve their work. This is because, although marking is positive, it does not consistently provide pupils with clear information about the next step in their learning.

Parents are involved very well in supporting their children. For example, a very helpful book is given to parents, when their children start school, about how they can help them to succeed. A particularly impressive aspect of the pupils' learning is the preparation for their future life in the world of work. For example, after consultation by the headteacher when he first arrived in the school, the pupils expressed a desire for a new play area. A group of pupils was given responsibility for this, which included planning the area, interviewing prospective contractors to listen to their presentations and finally choosing which one should win the contract.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. The nursery curriculum is well planned and exciting and in the reception classes, work is based on interesting and engaging topics which grab the children's interest. The provision for children's outside play is limited by the lack of an outside area adjacent to the reception classrooms. A focus on developing pupils' reading, mathematical and ICT skills throughout the school has contributed to high standards in these subjects. As part of its work to further promote excellence and enjoyment, this year the school is developing the planning in a range of other subjects, such as geography, history and religious education, in order to build cross-curricular links and make the work even more stimulating. There has been a good deal of work recently on helping pupils to understand how they learn. The induction week at the beginning of this academic year, for example, has helped pupils to settle very well into their new classes and develop their self-esteem and confidence. It has established a very positive atmosphere for learning. A wealth of interesting activities outside lessons are designed to capture pupils' interest and good use is made of the local area to bring learning alive. During the inspection, for example, a 'Roman soldier' kept the Year 3 pupils enthralled as he explained about life in the Roman army. After-school activities are popular with pupils and the school teams do particularly well in inter-school matches and competitions in a wide range of sports.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support for pupils is good. Pupils all have identified, personal goals in each subject, although some are not specific enough to support even better progress. The school complies with all statutory requirements to protect children and keep them safe. Great care is taken to ensure that pupils work and play in a protected, healthy, safe and enjoyable environment. Good records are kept of any accidents that occur. These are followed through and analysed to improve practice further. Parents feel that the systems in place to ensure the total care and well-being of their children are exemplary. There is very little bullying and children are free from racist behaviour. The progress learners make is monitored well and steps taken, with the help of the special needs co-ordinator, to help every child who is not finding the work easy to reach suitable goals. Good links with external agencies, such as the Local Education Authority support services, support this process very well.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The quality of leadership and management is good. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership. Since his appointment earlier this year he has brought a fresh and innovative approach to school improvement strategies. He has a clear vision for the school's future and is setting crystal-clear direction to its work. In this he is most ably supported by the new deputy headteacher. Along with other managers, they ensure that their vision is communicated well at all levels within the school. A number of new appointments have recently been made which have strengthened the effectiveness of the management and staff teams. This has added significantly to the provision that is made to improve pupils' learning. There is excellent attention paid to evaluating the school's performance through rigorous self-evaluation that seeks to involve the whole-school community. A particular strength is the voice that has recently been given to parents and pupils. They have been widely canvassed, through questionnaires and discussions, to seek opinions. As a result, action has been taken to ensure that the school is meeting the needs of those who are most important – the pupils. Governors undertake their responsibilities well and have a very clear view of how they can best help the school to continue to improve.

There is a very strong commitment to moving the school forward. A very good example is the thorough analysis that has been carried out of the strengths and areas for development in the school and the very clear plans that have been set to aid on-going improvement. Despite the early days of the current management structure, it is proving to be effective and new strategies are already beginning to have a positive impact. For example, the school has recognised the relative weakness in some more able pupils' writing and is working hard to deal with it by encouraging more lively and interesting writing styles. The staff are also involved in a forward-looking initiative to improve pupils' learning skills to continue to raise standards across the range of subjects.

Finances are very carefully managed. For example, governors had retained some funds, realising that developments were needed. Sensibly, they waited until the new headteacher was in post to see what input he might have. The pupils say that new improvements, such as the computer suite and the separate classrooms in the Years 3 to 6 block, have made a big difference to their enjoyment of learning. The school gives good value for money.

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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?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	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	2	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?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	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	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	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

Blackwood School Blackwood Road Streetly Sutton Coldfield West Midlands B74 3PH

16 September 2005

Dear Pupils

We really enjoyed our time in your school and would like to thank you for the way you welcomed us and made us feel at home. You can be very proud of your school as it is good.

The best things about your school are:

You work very hard, make good progress and reach high standards.

The leadership of your headteacher is excellent. He and other staff are extremely clear about how to improve the school so that you can make even better progress.

Teaching is good and your lessons are interesting. For example, most of your teachers use the interactive whiteboards very well to help you learn successfully.

Your behaviour is good, you get on very well with one another and enjoy coming to school.

We are particularly impressed with the way you are being prepared for life when you are older, particularly in the healthy and active lifestyle that you are adopting and the way that you are involved in the running of your school.

You are very well cared for. All staff make sure that you are safe and secure.

There are a few things that we are suggesting to the school that they could do to improve the education you enjoy. They are already working at these.

You are not sufficiently clear about how you can improve your work. Your targets are not always precise enough and teachers, when they mark your books, do not often show you how to make your work better.

Your writing is not as good as your reading or speaking and listening.

Yours sincerely

John D Eadie (Lead inspector)