



St James CofE Primary School, Ashton-under-Lyne

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 106231
LEA Tameside
Inspection number 277514
Inspection dates 20 June 2006 to 21 June 2006
Reporting inspector Ms Suzi Clipson-Boyles HMI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Romney Street
School category	Voluntary controlled		Ashton-under-Lyne
Age range of pupils	3 to 11		Lancashire OL6 9HU
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0161 3302008
Number on roll	210	Fax number	-
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs C Shaw
Date of previous inspection	6 November 2000	Headteacher	Mrs V Marsh

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
3 to 11	20 June 2006 - 21 June 2006	277514

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This smaller than average primary school is housed on its original Victorian site in Ashton-under-Lyne. It amalgamated with a nearby nursery school in September 2002. The Foundation Stage is situated on the previous nursery school site, alongside a SureStart unit. The cultural mix of children is around one-third Asian and two-thirds White British. Most of the children of Asian heritage speak English as an additional language and many are at an early stage of learning English when they start school. Children are drawn from an area of high social need. The number of children eligible for a free school meal is higher than normal. The proportion of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is about average, but they are unevenly distributed between classes.

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 provides a good quality of education and children achieve well overall. Since the last inspection, national test results at Year 6 have risen steadily and between 2003 to 2005 they were well above average. Currently, standards in Year 6 are above average, and this represents very good progress from children's below average starting points. However, some of the more able children are capable of even more. At Key Stage 1, standards have declined somewhat recently. This decline has now been arrested due to an improvement in the quality of teaching, and children now make satisfactory and sometimes good progress. The quality of provision in the Foundation Stage (Nursery and Reception classes) is satisfactory. Across the school teaching is satisfactory overall although it is good in several classes. The rise and fall in standards and progress in the different key stages are the consequences of a number of factors, including the deployment of staff, the loss of key staff, and the natural variations between cohorts.

Children enjoy school, and most behave very well. Their attitudes to learning are very good. Nearly all children receive good support for their academic and personal progress, especially those children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, or with English as an additional language, and vulnerable children in general. However, more able children do not receive sufficient challenge in their work.

The headteacher and deputy headteacher provide good leadership and management. They hold a generally accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Their leadership has had a very positive impact since the last inspection. They involve all members of the school community in evaluating how well the school is doing. This results in wide ranging plans for improvement. However, at present the school is working on too many initiatives for maximum impact on what matters most. Staff are highly committed to doing the best for the children and teamwork is strong. The governing body is supportive and well organised but it does not monitor standards systematically or provide sufficient challenge for the senior leadership. Considerable improvement has been made since the last inspection, and the capacity for further improvement is good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the consistency of teaching and learning so that all children make at least good progress.
- Focus the school improvement plan on a smaller number of priorities that are aimed at having maximum impact on standards and quality.
- Provide additional challenge for the more able children.
- Develop a systematic approach for governors to monitor children's standards and progress and hold the school to account more fully.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good overall. Standards rise considerably as children move up the school. However, some of the more able children of all ages could be challenged to reach even higher goals.

Children start in the Nursery with a very wide range of abilities and many children are below the average levels for their age. However, there are also several more able children in every class. Children receive a satisfactory start in the Foundation Stage unit. Play activities and more structured teaching help them develop important early skills and understanding across all areas of learning. By the end of Reception, all children have made reasonable progress, although overall standards remain below average. Children make good progress by the end of Key Stage 1 although overall standards are still lower than the national average. During Key Stage 2, children make good progress overall, but this is not consistent, and is much better in some classes than in others. Standards reached in national tests at Year 6 were significantly higher than the national averages in the period from 2003 to 2005, and though standards are lower this year, children are still on target to achieve well. Children who speak English as an additional language achieve particularly well. Most groups of learners, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make at least good progress and some make very good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Children's personal development and well-being are very good and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Most children behave very well. Older children are kind to the younger ones. Children enjoy learning, particularly in Key Stage 2. All age groups show positive attitudes to work and they are particularly enthusiastic about the large number of clubs after school. Attendance has improved considerably in recent years and is now in line with the national average.

The Christian ethos underpins the school's work, promoting care, respect and understanding of diversity. Outstanding approaches to celebrating festivals enable children and parents from different religions to worship alongside one another. Children develop self-esteem and confidence because their achievements are valued by staff and rewarded, for example, through the use of badges and certificates. They understand how to keep safe and healthy and make positive choices, such as exercising and drinking water regularly. The school council is involved in decision-making and organising events and looks forward to being even more active. Children take part in community projects such as recycling. They are developing a sense of responsibility for others less fortunate than themselves. They raise funds for local and national charities and for international disaster relief.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. In some classes where the teaching is good children find lessons interesting, active and challenging. There are also higher expectations and work is well matched to children's different capabilities so they make good progress. However, the pace in other lessons is too slow and children lose interest. At times there is too much consolidation of work that children already understand which reduces their progress. The quality of teaching and learning in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory. There is a balance between play and direct teaching. Interesting themes such as the World Cup make enjoyable links between areas of learning. Emphasis is placed on teaching good behaviour in these early stages. Much support is also provided for children with English as an additional language throughout the school. In most classes teachers manage behaviour well. They have a firm and encouraging approach that helps to underpin learning. Teaching assistants, bilingual assistants, learning mentors and an extra teacher for children from minority ethnic backgrounds add significantly to the quality of children's learning. Resources are used well in teaching, including interactive whiteboards. Effective procedures are used to assess and track children's learning but teachers do not always make good use of this information to inform planning. For example, learning is not often planned in ways that challenge the more able children by building on what they already know. In a small number of classes, teachers include opportunities for children to reflect on their work and set themselves targets for future lessons. Teachers' marking praises children for their efforts but does not always give guidance on what they need to do next to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school's curriculum is of good quality. It is rich and varied. It meets especially well the needs of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those children who have English as an additional language. There are many opportunities for creativity. Evidence of this is apparent in the colourful displays throughout the school. Teachers link subjects into themes that make learning more relevant and interesting. Children are often taken out of school, for instance to Bramhall Hall while learning about the Tudors, and to the local garden centre when learning about plants. Visitors such as poets and dance groups also help to make learning more exciting. Priority is given to teaching important skills that facilitate thinking and understanding. For example, in literacy, children are encouraged to talk to a partner to promote speaking and listening. The school is beginning to plan activities that relate to children's future world of work. In information and communication technology (ICT), Year 6 children demonstrate high levels of knowledge and skills. For example, during the inspection, they used interactive software to control sounds and movements inside a representation of a haunted house.

There is an outstanding range of after-school clubs for all age groups. Cricket, art and 'Bollywood' dancing are just some of the favourites!

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school takes good care of all its children, and staff have the highest concern for their welfare. In this safe and supportive environment, children thrive and make good progress socially and academically. Procedures for keeping children safe from harm are rigorous and there are effective arrangements for ensuring that all staff are suitably vetted against police records. Children at risk are identified early and appropriate action taken to ensure their well-being. Health and safety systems are generally effective, although some aspects of the Victorian site present problems, such as lack of space for older children to run around outside. Learning mentors play a prominent and successful role in caring for and supporting vulnerable children emotionally and academically. Procedures for monitoring and supporting children with their work are generally good. Children are becoming more involved in assessing their learning. The school works well with parents and outside agencies to support children's learning. Looked after children are monitored particularly carefully. The school ensures a smooth transition when children move to a new school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is managed effectively. The headteacher and deputy headteacher work closely together. They have overcome most of the difficulties associated with the amalgamation and the loss of key staff. They are constantly seeking ways of improving the school; for example, by moving staff to where they are most effective. They plan extensively, and the school is part of many initiatives to enrich learning and promote high quality care. However, there are sometimes too many areas being covered at the same time. The school's self-evaluation is thorough and is informed by consultation with staff, children, parents and governors. The capacity to improve further is good due to the strong leadership and a team of staff that is highly committed to securing the best for the children. There have been considerable improvements since the last inspection, particularly children's progress in English and mathematics by the end of Key Stage 2, and in ICT. The vast majority of parents express confidence in the school. Parents receive information of good quality and many are actively involved in the school's work; for example, in road safety and in preparing food from different cultures. The budget is well managed and the school provides good value for money. The governing body has undergone changes of leadership recently but meetings and sub-committees have remained stable and well organised. Governors are supportive, but they do not yet have a systematic approach to monitoring standards in the school and cannot, therefore, hold the school to account fully. The school works effectively with many different agencies for the benefit of the children, including the SureStart unit. It is a member of a partnership of local schools, which provides useful additional

support such as providing learning mentors and encouraging professional links with other schools.

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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	3	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	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	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	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?	3	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	3	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

Thank you very much indeed for making us so welcome when we visited your school recently. Mr Pattinson and I enjoyed our two days of inspecting. There was such a friendly and caring atmosphere. You were very polite and helpful to us in all sorts of ways and we are very grateful.

We think that St James is a good school. Mrs Marsh and Mrs Dodd are always planning lots of new things to help you. They listen to everyone's views so that important things are not missed. When new ideas are put into practice they watch carefully to see if they are making a difference. You learn and behave very well. We noticed especially how kind and helpful you are to each other, and that impressed us very much. Lots of other people help you as well, like the learning mentors and special assistants who speak two languages. By the time you get to Year 6 you have made so much progress during your time at St James that you are able to get very high results in your tests. You tell us that you enjoy school and we saw that you have very positive attitudes to lessons. We think that all the extra clubs you go to are brilliant, and the special revision club in Year 6 helps you prepare for tests. Your attendance at school has really improved because you don't have too many days off now. Well done!

There are four things that we think the school can do to help you even more.

- Firstly, we have asked Mrs Marsh to help the teachers to focus on fewer new projects at any one time. We don't want them to get overloaded!
- Secondly, we want her to make sure that all children make good progress.
- Thirdly, we think that some of the more able children could do slightly harder work.
- And finally, we would like your school governors to look more closely at what you do in school so they can help to keep the school on track.

We hope that you will all work as well as you can so that the school becomes even better! We send our very best wishes to you all for a happy and successful future.