



Nicol Mere School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 106430
LEA Wigan
Inspection number 277557
Inspection dates 25 January 2006 to 26 January 2006
Reporting inspector Mr George Crowther CfBT Lead Inspector

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Roman Road
School category	Community		Ashton-in-Makerfield
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		Wigan, Lancashire WN4 8DF
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01942 720 871
Number on roll	377	Fax number	01942 274 320
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr W Greenwood
Date of previous inspection	6 November 2000	Headteacher	Mrs A Worsley

Age group 4 to 11	Inspection dates 25 January 2006 - 26 January 2006	Inspection number 277557
-----------------------------	---	------------------------------------

© Crown copyright 2006

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Nicol Mere is a large primary school. Its social context is no more or less favourable than most schools. Children's attainment when they start school is similar to that expected for their age. The proportion of children eligible for free school meals is average. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. A few children are from minority ethnic heritages, but none is at the early stages of learning English. During the last two years the school has experienced significant disruption to staffing, including at leadership level.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

The effectiveness of the school and the value for money it provides are inadequate. In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement because it is performing significantly less well than, in all the circumstances, it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to children's progress, the quality of teaching in Years 3 to 6, and aspects of leadership and management.

During the past two years, the school has been through a period of considerable upheaval and uncertainty. New leadership is now in place, but there is a legacy of children in Years 3 to 6 being disaffected and making too little progress. The school has begun to tackle its weaknesses and the impact of the measures taken is already evident, particularly in children's attitudes to learning and their behaviour.

Children make good progress up to Year 2 where above average standards are attained. In Years 3 to 6, despite recent improvement, progress is still too slow because of weak teaching in some classes. More able children, in particular, are not always challenged. Overall, by the end of Year 6, standards are below average. Children's standards of personal development, including their behaviour, are satisfactory. By Year 6, they have a positive approach to their work and carry out responsibilities sensibly.

The quality of teaching and learning is inadequate owing to significant weaknesses in Years 3 to 6. The curriculum is satisfactory, with good provision for children's personal, social and health education. There is a growing variety of activities beyond lessons. Foundation Stage provision is good.

Leadership and management are satisfactory and have made a determined start on school improvement. Some aspects of management, however, such as using information about the school's performance to deal with underachievement, are not rigorous enough. The school's evaluation of its work is realistic but slightly too positive at this stage in terms of judging its overall effectiveness. Although improvement since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory, leadership has the commitment and potential to bring about improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- improve children's progress in Years 3 to 6, particularly for the more able
- improve the quality of teaching, including the use of assessment information to ensure that work is appropriately challenging
- strengthen aspects of leadership and management so that underachievement is identified and tackled.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Children's achievement is unsatisfactory. Reception children make good progress and reach standards that are generally above expectations by the end of their first year in school. Good progress continues in Years 1 and 2 and leads to national test results that are frequently well above average. Standards in the current Year 2 are also above average. In contrast, children's progress in Years 3 to 6 is unsatisfactory. This is because the quality of teaching and learning varies too much between classes and is inadequate in too many lessons. Since 2002, Year 6 test results have never been better than average and on occasions have been significantly below average. The school has not met its targets. Measures of children's progress from Year 3 to Year 6 are much worse than for most schools. For example, in 2005, for mathematics and science, progress was in the bottom ten per cent of schools nationally. Achievement in the current Year 6 has improved significantly because there is now a much stronger focus on how well each child is doing, but standards remain below average. The achievement of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is unsatisfactory, overall, due to the weaknesses in teaching. In Years 3 to 6, more able children are often not challenged sufficiently. The school has identified this weakness and is tackling it.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Children's personal development is satisfactory. They are positive about their school and like being there. They appreciate the ways in which staff help them, particularly in improving behaviour in the school which is now satisfactory. They say lessons are fun and they enjoy taking part in activities outside of lessons. Most children work and play together harmoniously. A small number, however, still has difficulty in sustaining concentration and co-operating with others. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. They listen with interest to their teachers' strong, moral messages. Through their work in personal, social, health and citizenship education, children become increasingly aware of themselves, others, and the need for good relationships.

The school council gives children good experiences of working together for the benefit of the community. For instance, they have been influential in introducing a buddy system and are looking at ways to improve the playground facilities. Other examples of children contributing to society include singing in a local care home and supporting a charitable project for young children in South Africa. Children know how to make healthy choices and how to stay safe. Attendance is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

The quality of teaching and learning is unsatisfactory. Up to Year 2, good teaching helps children to learn well but in Years 3 to 6 there are weaknesses and too many lessons are inadequate. Where teaching is good, sometimes outstanding, lessons are planned meticulously and children understand clearly what they are expected to learn. Teachers capture children's interest and expect them to work well either on their own or in groups. However, in too many lessons in Years 3 to 6, the pace of learning is slow and the work is not pitched at the right level to get the best from all children. They are often bored by mundane activities, which are not planned well enough. As a result, they can disrupt their own and others' learning. When teaching assistants are well briefed they provide good support for children, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In some lessons, however, their good skills are not used well enough.

Using assessment information to set children learning targets is beginning to have a positive impact on their progress. In some classes, there is good use of assessment to identify the progress children are making and help them understand the next steps in their learning. However, this practice is inconsistent across the school and unsatisfactory in some classes.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. The Foundation Stage provides a good range of stimulating learning opportunities. However, despite teachers' creativity, facilities for outdoor learning are weak, which restricts some aspects of learning.

For the rest of the school, the needs of children are matched to a relevant curriculum. There are weaknesses in some classes in Years 3 to 6 because lessons are not planned well enough to meet the needs and interests of all children. In music, a range of interesting activities, including choir and the opportunity to learn an instrument, supports children's learning effectively.

Provision for personal and social education is a strong priority across the school and helps prepare children to contribute to society. It gives them opportunities to work together, to reflect, and to express their feelings. Some children have received awards as 'Good Citizens', whilst other have been accredited as 'Play Leaders', a job they thoroughly enjoy. Educational visits and visitors to school enrich the curriculum, as does the satisfactory range of clubs and activities outside lessons, such as the Soccer Academy.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

This is a caring school. The children trust the staff and, when they need help or advice, they know who to turn to. There is support for them when they are troubled or upset. Children say they feel safe in school because the staff deal swiftly and effectively with any problems, such as bullying. Child protection and health and safety procedures are in place and good links with outside agencies ensure a range of help for those children who require it. Arrangements for settling children into the school and for their transfer to secondary school are satisfactory. Some children are made aware of their learning targets and have been informed of what they need to do to improve, but this is not consistent across the school. Older children, in particular, are not involved enough in the assessment of their own learning. Targeted help is provided for some children who find learning hard.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Following a very unsettled period the school now has a clear purpose and direction, which is enabling it to tackle much needed improvements. The acting headteacher, with the full support of the senior staff team, is raising expectations, ensuring that children's personal development is promoted effectively and helping everyone to focus on improving children's progress. As a result, the school has the potential to improve further, strengthened by good support from the local authority.

The management team has an increasingly clear and realistic understanding of the school's performance with effective checks on key aspects, such as children's progress and the quality of teaching. As yet, however, not enough use is made of this information to identify and support children who are not doing as well as they could. Consequently, the school does not fully meet the needs of children from all backgrounds and of all abilities. The school improvement plan identifies appropriate areas for development but there are too many and the key priorities are not given sufficient prominence. As such, staff and governors are not sufficiently focused on the most important areas for improvement.

Governors support the school wholeheartedly and fulfil their responsibilities satisfactorily. They have a sound understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, but do not focus strongly enough on evaluating the impact of measures to improve children's progress. Although subject leaders are developing their skills, they are still not influential enough in improving standards of teaching and learning. Resources for learning and the accommodation are good.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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
--	-----------------------	--------------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	4	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4	NA

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	4	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	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?	3	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	4	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

We visited your school last week to find out if it is giving you the education you should receive. Thank you for making us feel so welcome and for being so helpful when we asked you questions. We enjoyed talking with you, looking at your work and finding out about the things you like doing.

We think there are a number good things about your school, but we also discovered that some of you are not making as much progress as you could. The things we particularly like are:

- your school is a friendly place where everyone usually gets on well together
- you are positive about your school and your learning, which helps you to do well in many lessons
- in the Reception classes, Year 1 and Year 2, you learn particularly well
- you said most lessons are fun and you enjoy the work
- your school is a caring place and you said the staff look after you well
- the school council is doing a good job
- you enjoy having responsibilities such as 'Play Leaders' and you carry these out well
- there are lots of music activities, which many of you enjoy.

We would like you to work with your teachers to improve the way you learn.

- In Years 3 to 6, some of you are not making as much progress as you could. We have asked your teachers to make sure that the work you are given in lessons is just right so that you have to think hard, but you can get on quickly.
- Many of you already have learning targets to help you know what you need to do to improve your work. We have asked your teachers to use targets even more so that you can make the next step in your learning as soon as possible.
- We want Mrs Worsley and the rest of the teachers to spot when you are not learning as quickly as you could and make sure you get the help you need.

Thank you for helping us so much with the inspection of your school. Please share this letter with the other children. We both hope you will carry on enjoying learning and helping your teachers to make Nicol Mere School a good place to be.