



Bickershaw CofE Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 106470
Local Authority Wigan
Inspection number 277568
Inspection dates 30–31 January 2007
Reporting inspector Allan Torr HMI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Bickershaw Lane
School category	Voluntary aided		Bickershaw, Wigan
Age range of pupils	4–11		Lancashire WN2 4AE
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01942 866317
Number on roll (school)	100	Fax number	01942 864768
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr R Platt
		Headteacher	Mr P Radcliffe
Date of previous school inspection	18 September 2000		

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Bickershaw is a smaller than average primary school. It is part of Leigh Excellence Cluster and serves a community which has higher than average levels of economic and social disadvantage. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average. Most pupils are of a White British background. The proportion of pupils who are eligible to receive a free school meal is almost twice the national average. The school has achieved a number of awards including the Wigan Quality Standard, Healthy Schools award and Investors in Children validation.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Bickershaw is an outstanding school. A typical parental comment was that, 'the school has a very good atmosphere and the staff genuinely care for the children'. This sentiment was echoed by pupils and inspectors. There is a strong Christian ethos of care and respect which pervades the school. The headteacher and senior leaders promote high expectations and a relentless focus in developing outstanding achievement in pupils' academic and personal development. Support systems are established in order to help pupils grow as a young person. This is a truly inclusive school with each pupil central to its mission.

The children enter school with well below average skills in literacy and in numeracy. They make outstanding progress so that by the time they leave Year 6 they have reached standards which are above expectations for pupils nationally. This is because of excellent teaching and support which is linked precisely to the needs and interests of each pupil. Although guidance and support in lessons is very strong, pupils do not always know exactly what steps they need to take next to improve the standard of their work. Problems and barriers to learning are identified early. The headteacher and deputy headteacher sift through a range of programmes to find one which will match what the pupils need. Pupils overwhelmingly enjoy their time at school. The curriculum is very well constructed and relevant. Pupils have a say in what they want to learn. For example, during a topic on the Earth pupils in Year 5 identified that they would like to learn more about tsunamis whilst Year 6 preferred a focus on volcanoes.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Their behaviour is exemplary due to high expectations which are understood and consistently applied throughout the school. As a result, learning is rarely interrupted and pupils are able to thrive and concentrate on their work. Pupils have an outstanding attitude to healthy living. This is having a positive impact on their diet and their active lifestyles at home and at school. The school's focus on inclusion and mutual respect is shown in the way in which pupils cooperate, play safely and know who to turn to if they need help.

Close links between the local church and the school fosters an understanding that pupils are part of a larger community to which they make an excellent contribution. They take on posts of responsibility which develops their self-esteem and confidence, for example, some pupils are trained to be playground buddies and play leaders. One pupil was pleased to tell inspectors how she explained the buddy system to her mother who now uses the idea in her work. Pupils are involved in a wide range of local and national projects and competitions. Pupils in Years 5 and 6, for example, created a design for a park in the village and presented their design at the town hall. Opportunities to work closely in teams and learn life skills mean that they are extremely well prepared for their future lives as young adults.

There has been significant improvement since the last inspection. The headteacher and deputy headteacher skilfully lead and manage the school. Expectations and aspirations are high. Resources are well deployed to give excellent value for money and to give every pupil a real chance of success in the future. In all actions the school

ensures that the spotlight is kept firmly on the achievement and inclusion of all pupils. The school has a very good capacity to make further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Sharpen the school's existing arrangements for the setting of targets so pupils know exactly what they need to do next to improve the standard of their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils achieve outstandingly to reach standards which are above and sometimes well above the national average.

Most pupils enter the Reception class with well below average skills for their age especially in language, reading, writing and mathematical development. Boys, in particular, start school well below expectations. Whilst in the Foundation Stage (Reception class) pupils make rapid progress. By the time they enter Year 1 most pupils have caught up and reached the early learning goals expected of them, although they are still below average in reading and writing.

As a result of good progress in Key Stage 1 pupils reach standards in reading, writing and in mathematics that are broadly in line with national averages.

Standards in English in Key Stage 2 are good. Pupils attain particularly well in mathematics and in science, so that by the time they leave Year 6 standards are well above national average in these subjects because pupils have met or exceeded challenging targets. Boys and pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make better progress than similar pupils nationally. Overall achievement for all pupils is excellent based on their starting points.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Throughout their time at Bickershaw, pupils develop excellent personal skills and attributes which help them become thoughtful and mature young people. This comes from outstanding spiritual, moral, social, and cultural understanding. Pupils take up opportunities to reflect: for example, in work about Thanksgiving celebrations pupils wrote down their thoughts about all the things in their lives and in the world that they were thankful for. Pupils learn to respect differences between each other and show genuine concern and compassion for the welfare of others. This has impacted on pupils' behaviour which is outstanding. Right from the start of their time at school pupils are guided to behave well in a variety of situations and as a result, the use of formal sanctions is rare. Pupils explore religious and cultural beliefs and understand how it affects people's lives. For example, they set up a Fair Trade stall at a fundraising event and raised funds for Water Aid.

Attendance is broadly average and the school does all it can to encourage pupils to come to school regularly. The school routinely asks for pupils' views in lessons and on whole-school matters. Through this pupils know that they can influence decisions made on a range of issues, from whether more teaching is needed, for example on long division in mathematics, to the purchase of new equipment for outdoor play.

Pupils described a range of ways in which the school's provision has had an impact on their lives to make them healthier. For example, one pupil said, 'I weren't that into tennis before the tournament, I now play outside school.' Another commented, 'me and my mum have skipping ropes now'.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Central to the pupils' excellent progress is the outstanding work of the whole staff. A good proportion of teaching in the school is outstanding. There is a tangible feeling of everyone working together as a tightly knit team to ensure lessons are matched precisely to the needs and interests of pupils. Any barriers to learning are overcome because pupils' needs are identified at a very early stage and action is taken immediately using carefully chosen support programmes. A project based on movement skills, for example, was introduced to help a pupil who was having difficulty with coordination. In another example, the very capable learning mentor worked regularly with a group of pupils before school to improve their skills of concentration. The learning mentor and teaching assistants are highly skilled and are deployed very well to maximise learning.

Interactive whiteboards and other resources are used very well to enliven lessons and to ensure that pupils are engaged in their learning. This was seen in the best lessons where pupils were active, engrossed in their work and challenged by open-ended questioning and tailor made tasks. Inspectors saw some exemplary attitudes to learning in class. A minority of lessons were satisfactory because pupils were passive and opportunities were not always taken to extend learning. Pupils enjoy lessons because staff are enthusiastic and thorough in their teaching and ensure that each individual makes progress.

Children learn skills of independence. For example, on entry to the Reception class, they use the interactive whiteboard to find and drag their names to self-register. The depth of knowledge about each child enables the teaching to be focused and the progress they make to be rapid.

Questioning and other forms of assessment are used very well to check pupils' understanding. Lessons are amended to take effective action if pupils are unsure about an aspect of their work. Across the curriculum pupils were able to assess their own progress and the work of others. Although targets were in place, teachers did not always give pupils a detailed enough understanding of their future targets to know what to do to improve the standard of their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Real life situations and experiences are used as a stimulus for pupils' work. This, combined with an approach which builds basic skills across subjects makes the curriculum outstanding. Community, local and national projects come together with carefully planned trips and visits from specialists to provide pupils with a rich and vibrant learning experience. A visiting poet and artist came to school, for example, to work with pupils to produce quality art and writing linked to the Victorians theme. The curriculum is carefully planned to ensure that pupils make progress in their skills and understanding across all subjects. The school is fully committed to ensuring that the curriculum builds on what pupils already know and inspires them to develop their knowledge and interests further.

Theme days and weeks enhance and enliven the curriculum. Strong links with the local high school provide pupils with specialist teaching in, for example, science and physical education (PE). A range of extra-curricular activities is well supported by pupils, including a writing club, sport and music clubs and a mathematics club.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The commitment of staff to care for the well-being and progress of pupils is excellent. One parent summed up the views of many when saying that the 'headteacher and staff go to great lengths to solve problems and monitor our children'. This close monitoring of progress, early recognition of each pupil's needs followed up by carefully crafted support and care is what makes this aspect outstanding. Individual education plans are written for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities with precise targets which are evaluated by teachers and by the pupils themselves. Support staff work with groups and individuals as soon as it is noticed that there is a barrier to learning. For example, pupils who may have emotional difficulties are given additional support to help develop their social and coping skills.

The school provides a safe and secure environment for pupils to succeed. Safeguarding procedures are in place and risk assessments for educational visits enable staff to be fully aware of any potential risk out of school. Pupils and parents agree that they are well looked after. Very good induction procedures are in place to ensure a smooth entry into school. Transition arrangements for pupils moving between key stages are outstanding. For example, the Year 3 teacher learns about the abilities and needs of pupils moving into Key Stage 2 by taking the Year 2 class once a week. Year 7 teachers from the high school have visited Bickershaw to observe pupils in class and teach them subjects such as science and PE.

Links with parents and outside agencies are very strong. The school has established a weekly toddler group to compensate for the lack of pre-school provision in the village. Staff are proactive at contacting specialists to help out in school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The excellent leadership of the headteacher and deputy headteacher set a clear vision for continuous improvement. This is shared by staff and governors leading to high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Information from assessments of pupils' progress is used effectively to set challenging targets for year on year improvement. The views of parents and pupils and all others concerned with the school are taken into account when planning for future developments. The leadership team carefully judge any new initiative or programme to see whether it will suit the needs of the school. They are careful not to take on new projects unless it is shown that it will improve the outcomes for pupils. Subject leaders and senior managers are very effective in raising achievement and supporting pupils. They ensure that teaching is adjusted to meet the needs of individuals. Staff are fully trained and equipped with the resources and skills to improve their practice. Leadership, quality and provision in the Foundation Stage are outstanding.

Governors are strong supporters of the school. Committees are being restructured to ensure that governors are more knowledgeable and able to hold the school to account. School self-evaluation is generally accurate and based upon rigorous monitoring of provision. In some respects the school's view of itself was modest.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school. It was a pleasure to talk to you and to hear your views about Bickershaw. We were very impressed with all the visits and projects that you do - not many schools have such an impact on their locality by designing and making a Prayer-well and establishing two local parks. These are some of the things which we think you and the school do very well.

- We think that you make excellent progress in all of your work.
- Teaching is often outstanding.
- Your behaviour in class and around school is excellent.
- The teachers give you a really good say in what you learn.
- You get an excellent start to your learning in the Reception class.
- All of the teachers help and support you so that you can learn skills which will help you in the future.

Overall, we agree with you that Bickershaw is an outstanding school where you are well taught and supported to make as much progress as possible. To do even better, we think that you should know exactly what you need to do to reach higher standards. We have asked the school to think about the best way the teachers can guide you so that you know and understand your targets a little better.

We would like to wish you all the best for the future.