



Ellison Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 124188
LEA Staffordshire
Inspection number 281653
Inspection dates 27 March 2006 to 28 March 2006
Reporting inspector John Eadie AI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Ellison Street
School category	Community		Wolstanton
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire ST5 0BL
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01782 297680
Number on roll	438	Fax number	01782 297687
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr G Smith
Date of previous inspection	10 January 2000	Headteacher	Mr R Denly

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This large primary school serves an area of mixed housing on the edge of the town of Newcastle-under-Lyme. Almost all children are of White British heritage, with very small numbers from a range of other backgrounds. All speak English as their home language. The proportion of children with learning difficulties is broadly average. Owing to illness and other factors, there has been considerable disruption to the leadership of the school over the last two years. There is an acting headteacher.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school is providing a satisfactory education for its children and gives satisfactory value for money. The school's own evaluation of its effectiveness matches that of inspectors. There have been a number of acting headteachers and deputy headteachers for much of the last two years. Despite this turbulence, standards rose in the national tests in Year 6 last year. There have also been developments which have improved provision for children. The newly introduced systems to track their progress are a good example of this. However, there has been little monitoring of teaching and learning during this time and so good practice in teaching in a number of classes has not been shared. In particular, there are occasions when teachers provide the same work for all children. In these lessons, some more able children do not always make sufficient progress. The school is aware of these weaknesses and has plans to deal with them. The changes in leadership have led to further weaknesses. Although strengths and areas for development have been correctly identified, there is a lack of rigour in the monitoring and evaluation of the school's effectiveness and some deficiencies in the school improvement plan. School leaders and governors do not, therefore, have a complete picture of school performance. However, the overall quality of leadership and management is satisfactory.

Children enter school with below-average skills. They make satisfactory progress in the Reception classes, as a result of sound teaching and curriculum, to reach slightly below-average standards by the time they start in Year 1. Children make satisfactory progress through the rest of the school and reach broadly average standards by the time they leave. The curriculum is satisfactory and is enriched well by a good range of clubs, visits and visitors. Children's personal development is good and arrangements for their care, guidance and support are satisfactory.

Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory. With this in mind, and taking into account the developments made recently, despite the turbulence in leadership, the school is soundly placed to continue to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the rigour of monitoring the school's development so that senior managers and governors have a better understanding of the school's strengths and are able to deal with weaknesses more quickly.
- Improve the school improvement plan so that it identifies criteria for measuring success, clear timescales for developments and the personnel responsible for monitoring progress.
- Improve the consistency of teaching so that teachers always provide suitably challenging work for children of all abilities, especially the more able.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Children's achievement is satisfactory and they reach broadly average standards by the time they leave. Children start school with below-average skills and knowledge. They make satisfactory progress in the Reception classes to reach average standards in their personal development, but are still somewhat behind in aspects of their language and mathematical development. Satisfactory progress through the rest of the school enables children to achieve broadly average standards in the national tests in Year 2 and Year 6. The major reason that these standards are not higher is that too few children reach the higher levels in these tests and a few potentially higher-attaining pupils are underachieving. Children's progress is also limited by their relatively weak use of language. The school is introducing a scheme to tackle this.

The school's targets for the end of Year 6 are sufficiently challenging and have been met satisfactorily. Children with learning difficulties have clear plans made for their learning and make the same progress as their classmates.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Children's personal development is good. They work hard and enjoy coming to school. This is reflected in the fact that their attendance is satisfactory and improving. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. They behave well and have good relationships with adults in school. They are positive that they feel safe and that adults in school would help them if needed.

Children usually work and play safely. They stay healthy through eating the right foods and taking exercise, and are planning for a healthy tuck shop. The school council expresses opinions confidently and takes an interested and active role in school improvement. Children vehemently oppose bad behaviour or the use of racist language shown by a small minority of children. They are glad that the school takes a strong line on these issues and deals with them effectively. The school council raised funds for a visit by a theatre group to press home the message that this behaviour is unacceptable. Many older children have special responsibilities around the school and contribute well to the running of the school community. Year 6 children take part in a mini-enterprise to raise funds for an end-of-year visit. They are encouraged to save regularly with a local building society, and a few do. These features, allied to their progress in acquiring basic reading, writing and calculating skills, equip them well for their future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Throughout the school, teachers' good relationships with their classes are reflected in children's good concentration and behaviour. Good use is made of interactive whiteboards in Years 3 to 6 to hold children's attention and make lessons fun. Teachers mark work conscientiously and, increasingly, are adding comments or setting targets that help children to improve their work.

In many classes, teachers have high expectations of children's performance. For example, in a good literacy lesson, the teacher very effectively showed how well-chosen language can bring stories alive, promoting good responses from children. In the reception classes, children make good progress in developing personal and social skills because teachers expect a lot of them and help them to become independent.

The school has recently begun to gather more information about children's progress. However, this information is not yet used well enough to ensure that work builds consistently on what children already know. Children are grouped by ability for English and mathematics in Years 3, 4 and 6 but, within these groups, they often do the same work. Consequently, more able children are not always sufficiently challenged. Teaching assistants give sensitive support to children, including those with learning difficulties, but are often not involved with children's learning during teachers' introductions to lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and is generally planned to reflect the interests and needs of children, including those in the Reception classes. Provision for basic skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) is satisfactory, though literacy and numeracy are not sufficiently developed in other subjects. There are also weaknesses in the quality of ICT resources in a few classes which limit children's opportunity to practise skills regularly. The personal, social and health education programme is effective in ensuring that children learn about healthy living and keeping safe.

Visits and visitors support learning well and there are a good number of out-of-school activities which help children to learn new skills, such as debating. Also noteworthy are annual 'focus weeks' when children work together on common themes. The most recent theme, of 'creativity', was fostered well by visits from potters and artists, with children producing good quality work. The lack of a playing field restricts opportunities for competitive sport, though the school does all that it can to compensate for this.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Children's care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Children are safe in school as health and safety checks are carried out regularly and risk assessments are undertaken for school activities. The school is aware that further training in child protection is needed and has plans to ensure that this happens. A good number of adults are trained in first aid. There is a good programme of induction for the youngest children when they join Reception. Year 6 children are prepared well for joining their next school as they take part in a good range of projects.

In some classes, teachers' marking provides good guidance on how to improve. However, this good practice is not consistent through the school. There are satisfactory procedures for monitoring and celebrating all children's personal success, such as the presentation of certificates each week. Actions such as this have a positive influence on children's personal development and encourage pride in their accomplishments. The school works closely with outside agencies to ensure that those children with learning difficulties are supported appropriately.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. Despite the turbulence of recent years, the present leadership team are effective and are fully supported by the staff. Developments have been made, such as the system for tracking children's progress. This is helping to evaluate the effectiveness of learning. Leaders have also used outside agencies well during this time. For example, the local behaviour support team have recently been called in to help with improving the behaviour of a small minority of children.

There is not a clear delineation of duties between leaders and, as a result, the school does not have a sufficiently clear understanding of the quality of its provision. For example, there has been little monitoring of teaching and learning and so the good practice that exists in several classes is not being shared. Self-evaluation has been effective in that the school has an accurate picture of its effectiveness in most areas and the school improvement plan identifies suitable areas for development. However, the plan does not establish any criteria for measuring success or clear timescales, nor does it name the persons responsible for monitoring. Parents and pupils are consulted regularly and their views are taken into account in development planning. The recent updating of the behaviour policy was implemented as a result of these consultations.

Governance is satisfactory. Although governors are very supportive of the school and have a sound knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses, their role is not sufficiently developed. Their visits to school are not clearly focused on analysing the effectiveness of the school.

Bearing in mind the progress made despite the difficulties, the accuracy of self-evaluation and the good practice seen in several areas of the school's work, the school is soundly placed to continue to move forward.

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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?	3	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	3	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	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	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	3	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	3	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?	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	3	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	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

Dear Children,

Thank you for welcoming us to your school. We really enjoyed talking to you and looking at your work.

These are some of the things we liked best

- Most of you behave well even though the playground is very overcrowded.
- You know how to stay healthy and are being prepared well for your future.
- We think you are doing a really good job as a school council.
- You enjoy your lessons, many of which are interesting and fun, particularly in classes where there are interactive whiteboards.
- There is a good range of clubs and activities and you enjoy a good number of visits and visitors.

There are some things that need to be improved

- Some checks on how well the school is doing are not being carried out regularly enough.
- The staff and governors need to improve plans for making the school better.
- Your teachers do not always give you work that is sufficiently challenging.

Yours sincerely,

John D. Eadie Lead inspector