



Victoria Road Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 111226
LEA Cheshire
Inspection number 282702
Inspection dates 23 March 2006 to 24 March 2006
Reporting inspector Mr Brian Padgett HMI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Victoria Road
School category	Community		Northwich
Age range of pupils	3 to 11		Cheshire CW9 5RE
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01606 420 34
Number on roll	146	Fax number	01606 331 793
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs J McGahan
Date of previous inspection	19 March 2001	Headteacher	Mrs J Symes

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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 school is situated in the ward of Witton South, close to Northwich town centre. It serves a close knit, well established community. Generations of the same families have attended the school. Almost all are of white British heritage. There are pockets of social and economic disadvantage within the ward, amongst the most severe in Cheshire. A high proportion of the children, nearly 40%, have a school meal free of charge. About 20% of the children have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including behavioural difficulties. Five children have a statement of special educational needs.

The school has a community learning centre on site, the 'New Vic', and has applied to become a Children's Centre in 2008. A mother and toddler group uses a room in the Foundation Unit. The school has achieved the Gold Artsmark standard.

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 with some outstanding strengths. It provides good value for money and serves its children and the local community very well. Children achieve well. They get off to a good start in the Foundation Stage. Many enter school with below average levels of knowledge and skills for their age. Often, attainment on entry is very low. They make good and sometimes very good progress, and with few exceptions, achieve the standards expected of children by the time they leave Year 6. The staff are extremely dedicated. Teaching is of good quality overall, particularly in the effectiveness with which the basic skills of literacy, numeracy, science, and information and communication technology (ICT) are taught. However, it is through the quite exceptional care, guidance and support given to children and the concern for their well-being that the school has its biggest impact. Children, including the most vulnerable, make outstanding progress in their personal development, especially in their confidence and belief in themselves as learners.

The school has improved well since it was last inspected in 2003 when it was judged to be satisfactory, and has made remarkable progress since it was made subject to special measures in 2002. The school is now forging ahead. The school leads the way in bringing together services to support the education and care of children and families within communities. Leadership and management at all levels are of good quality, although there is room for improvement in the way the school plans for the future. School leaders know the strengths and weaknesses well. Self-evaluation is accurate, although inspectors judge it more effective than it judges itself. The school has a good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve teaching and learning in the foundation subjects, to make them consistent with the quality of teaching and learning in the basic skills.
- Refine school improvement planning to ensure a clearer focus on raising standards and quality.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children start school in the nursery at a disadvantage compared with many children of their age. Their speech, communication and social skills are lower than most. They make good progress in the positive ethos that pervades the Foundation Stage unit and by the time they leave the Reception class they have made up a lot of ground in acquiring basic skills.

Children achieve well throughout Key Stages 1 and 2. They make good progress to reach broadly average standards at Years 2 and 6 in the national tests. Those with the greatest needs, children with learning, behavioural and emotional difficulties and/or disabilities, often make the best progress. This pattern of attainment has been

maintained over the past three years, with occasional blips when results fall, as in English at Year 6 in 2005. This variation is not likely to be repeated, as children in the current Year 5 and 6 classes are on line to meet their challenging targets in English. Children also make good progress in ICT.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Children's personal development and well-being are outstanding. Children grow in self-belief and respect for others to a remarkable degree. They are polite. Their behaviour is good and they are keen to learn. Attendance is at national levels, and would be higher but for the fact that some children cannot attend all the time for medical reasons. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. By Year 6, children show maturity, an understanding of important values and beliefs, a care and respect for others, and independence in their learning far beyond their years. They take great pride in the school, have high aspirations and carry a good deal of responsibility for what happens in school. They help each other with evaluating learning, and the school council, for example, has a significant budget to spend. Children trust their teachers and the support staff. They feel safe and are well aware of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle. They make a significant contribution to the local community and are developing the skills for their future economic well-being outstandingly well. A relatively high proportion of the children who attend the school lead troubled lives. With the complete dedication of the school, working closely with their families and with outside agencies, these children are enabled to become effective learners who enjoy their lessons as well as any. They play a full part in the life of the school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Literacy and numeracy are taught particularly effectively: teachers adapt the national strategies to best meet the needs of the children. Most of the lessons observed during the inspection were good or better and no unsatisfactory teaching was seen. Lessons often captured children's interest, and good use was made of ICT to stimulate and motivate. Children are competent users of computers. Relationships are excellent, and all teachers manage children's behaviour positively and effectively. Teaching assistants play a very significant role in teaching and support for children. Marking is particularly thorough, with teachers making it clear to children what they have achieved and how to improve further. Children are confident evaluators of their own learning and of that of their partners, and regularly set themselves targets alongside those set by teachers. The school is a stimulating environment for learning, inside and outside, with celebrations of children's work and wall displays of high quality that provide information and guidance to children

in lessons. Generally, lessons in the foundation subjects were not as challenging as lessons in the core subjects and this is an area for improvement.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The quality of the curriculum is good. There is a clear focus on the basic skills and the children study a broad and balanced range of subjects. The school is developing its curriculum. Although not fully consistent, the opportunity to practise the skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT within history and geography lessons, for example, is freeing up time within the curriculum and making learning more meaningful. The use of the school grounds is being developed, particularly for science investigations and in the Foundation Stage, as an outdoor classroom. The school makes very good use of the expertise within the local secondary school, a specialist college for the performing arts, to enhance its own provision for dance and drama. As well as bringing visitors into school, teachers make effective use of the local community to take the children out of school to enrich their learning. To extend the curriculum, there is a good range of out of school clubs and extracurricular activities, some of which are run by the children.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support for children is outstanding and could hardly be bettered. Procedures to safeguard children are comprehensive and rigorous. The commitment of all the staff to each child is exceptional. If children are not able, for whatever reason, to benefit from the education the school provides, then no effort is spared in working with the family and other agencies to resolve the problems, however severe. In its unstinting work as a champion for children, the school has won the respect and cooperation of all the support agencies and the trust of some deeply disadvantaged families. It takes the lead in driving forward changes that remove barriers to learning within the community; for example, in providing family learning sessions for children and families, and in creating the 'New Vic' community learning centre. As a result, children make good and sometimes very good progress in their school work and outstanding progress in their all round development as young people. The school works very closely with the local secondary school and cooperates fully in what are outstandingly effective transition arrangements. Senior staff monitor and track the progress children make very thoroughly, making use of a whole range of assessments. Performance is carefully analysed to identify areas for improvement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school has improved radically since it was made subject to special measures four years ago. This improvement is due to determined and inspired leadership and successful team building. There have been recent changes to the leadership, including

a new headteacher and deputy headteacher. The present headteacher, appointed in an acting capacity while the county conducts a review of all its schools, has the full confidence of staff and the governing body, and is providing continuity and stability after a period of rapid change. The school has a very good ethos and a coherent philosophy of education that is shared by all staff. This is an outward-looking school that takes a lead role in local networks of schools and, on a national stage, with the National College of School Leadership. Staff are keen to improve further and they are heavily involved in professional development courses.

Governors are closely involved in the school's development and in the self-evaluation process. The school seeks the views of all who are involved with it, particularly the staff, parents and pupils. It has a clear view of its strengths and weaknesses, with which the inspectors agreed. If it is to be as successful in raising attainment as it has been in raising children's self esteem, then improvement plans should be more clearly focused on raising standards and evaluating whether the aims have been achieved. However, in the context of the progress the school has already made, this does not affect its good capacity for further improvement.

The school receives above average funding which it uses effectively to meet the challenges it faces. It provides 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?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	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	3	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?	1	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	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	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?	1	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	1	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

As you know, Mr Lawrence and I visited your school recently to find out how well you are learning. Thank you for being so open, polite and friendly. We enjoyed our two days at Victoria Road. I am writing to let you know what we found.

We think Victoria Road is a good school. All of you enjoy your lessons, you work hard and eventually achieve well in your national tests (SATs) in Year 6. You are all good learners from the time you join the nursery to the time you leave for secondary school.

We think the school has got better and better, first under the leadership of Mrs Nancollis, and now under Mrs Symes. Your teachers and the teaching assistants teach you well. They make sure you learn the important skills you will need for the future like literacy, numeracy and how to use computers, and they also make lessons interesting and enjoyable.

We found that all children are cared for, supported and guided exceptionally well. No school could do more to look after you and help you become better learners. It doesn't matter what problems you have, the teachers will find a way around them. Best of all, it works! You are reaching your targets and you are becoming very independent in your learning, like when you mark your own work and set your own targets. You also work really well together, help each other a lot and are always looking for something positive to say. There is always something to celebrate at Victoria Road.

It is no surprise you are proud of your school.

There is not a lot wrong with your school but we have asked Mrs Symes and the teachers to improve two things to make the school even better. They are:

- to make all lessons as interesting, challenging and enjoyable as the best
- for the governors, Mrs Symes and the teachers to rethink how they plan to improve the school and to make sure they check that what they do really does raise the standards of your work even further.

Of course, knowing how much you are involved in taking decisions, we are sure the members of the School Council will have a part to play in making some of these improvements happen.

Thank you very much for helping us with the inspection.