



Grace Mary Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 103945
Local Authority Sandwell
Inspection number 286816
Inspection dates 31 October –1 November 2006
Reporting inspector Jacqueline Wordsworth HMI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Hawfield Road
School category	Community		Tividale
Age range of pupils	3–11		Oldbury B69 1LD
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01384 255910
Number on roll (school)	253	Fax number	01384 457554
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Rob Pilsbury
		Headteacher	Linda Brown
Date of previous school inspection	5 February 2001		

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Grace Mary Primary School is an average-sized primary school whose pupils come from diverse social and economic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils having learning difficulties and disabilities is broadly in line with the national picture is broadly in line with the national picture. A third of the pupils are eligible for free school meals and this is higher than is the case nationally. The school holds Active Mark Gold and Healthy School Gold status. A new headteacher was appointed in September 2005.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school with particular strengths in the pupils' personal development and in the provision for children in the Foundation Stage. The school works well with families and the local community to achieve a safe and healthy school. Attendance is good. There is a positive ethos and the children make good progress in their spiritual, moral, cultural and social development. The pupils' good attitudes and positive social skills, including a keen awareness of others, stand them in good stead for the next stage of their education, although limited progress in developing their key academic skills holds them back.

Achievement is satisfactory. On joining the school in the Foundation Stage, new children are accurately assessed to establish their starting point and this information is used to carefully plan for their next steps in learning. As a result of this good planning and good teaching, they make good progress from low starting points. Further up the school, progress stalls. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory but too variable, ranging from inadequate to good. Typically, lessons consist of a demonstration by the teacher followed by routine exercises that consolidate skills but offer little challenge. Pupils have too few opportunities to develop reasoning, problem solving or investigatory skills or to write at length. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics are broadly average by the end of Key Stage 1 but remain so by the time pupils leave at the end of Key Stage 2, in spite of good teaching in Year 6.

The school has rightly identified that assessment information could be used more effectively in Key Stages 1 and 2 to give all pupils, but especially the potentially higher attainers, more challenging and personal targets to aim for so that they make as much progress as possible. Literacy and numeracy targets have been set for groups of pupils and these are sometimes displayed in the pupils' books. However, there is little linkage between these targets and the intended learning identified for future lessons. Marking is not completed often enough; furthermore, it rarely refers explicitly to pupils' targets and generally does not indicate what the pupils need to do to improve.

The curriculum meets basic statutory requirements, but there is considerable imbalance between subjects. In too many classes, literacy and numeracy lessons are too long and dominate the timetable, leaving insufficient time for other subjects.

The relatively new headteacher has a clear vision for the school and is fully aware of the steps that are required to achieve it. Based upon a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, she has taken steps to strengthen the underdeveloped roles and responsibilities of the senior and middle managers, especially in developing their skills in checking the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' learning. The school now has a sound capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching by sharing the good practice which engages pupils more effectively in their learning.

- Make more effective use of assessment information and marking to set individual targets for improvement so that pupils know exactly what they have to do to improve their work.
- Improve the skills of all leaders and managers in the monitoring of teaching and learning and assessing the effectiveness of their actions on raising standards.
- Ensure that the curriculum is fully adapted to meet the needs of all pupils by making sure that lessons are not too long and that subjects other than English, mathematics and science are given more prominence.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

When they start in the Nursery, children's knowledge and skills are low. Their oral language and communication skills are particularly weak, as are their personal, social and emotional skills. They make good progress through the Foundation Stage, due to the effective support provided by their teachers. However, the standards they reach at the end of the Reception Year are still below the national expectations for their age. Pupils make satisfactory and sometimes good progress in Key Stage 1, but they are still hampered by their limited vocabulary and difficulties in applying their knowledge in new situations. This particularly affects their writing skills but even so, pupils attain broadly average standards at the end of Year 2.

This promising early start is not built on well enough in Key Stage 2. Too much is left until Year 6, where pupils make rapid gains in their learning due to the effective teaching they receive. As a result, pupils reach average standards but have made satisfactory overall progress by the time they leave the school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development is good. Pupils are proud of their school. They are well behaved. When teaching is effective, they enjoy their lessons and are keen to achieve, but variations in teaching quality mean that this does not happen in enough lessons. Attendance is above average and a number of pupils take advantage of a scheme to 'buy back' time lost through absence by attending activities outside the school day. The school has sound procedures for considering pupils' views and providing opportunities to make a difference. The school council meets regularly and members are proud of how their actions have contributed to changes within the school. For example, the pupils have written the school's motto and devised the school's code of behaviour, which the older pupils ensure is followed by acting as prefects and buddies to the younger children.

The school ensures that pupils are made well aware of how to stay safe and be healthy. This is reflected in the large number of pupils who participate in the wide variety of after-school sporting clubs. The programme for pupils' personal development provides a firm foundation for them to develop a sense of self and what it means to be part of

a community. This is particularly evident in the provision in the nurture group, with targeted support for individual children to enable them to develop their social skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Overall, the quality of teaching is satisfactory, with some good features seen during the inspection, especially in the Foundation Stage. Here teaching is good. The teachers' expectations are appropriately high, with the work pitched at the right level to build on the pupils' existing understanding. Teachers know what they want the children to learn. They provide exciting and relevant experiences, which not only capture and fire the children's imagination but also clearly motivate them to strive harder for success. For example, children in Reception were excited about going on a 'Bear Hunt'. This lesson clearly brought the story to life for the children, and they were keen to achieve the task of following a map to find the bear. Nevertheless, there is much teaching in other parts of the school that is mundane and fails to excite the pupils' interest. In particular, work for the higher-attaining pupils is too easy and so they lose interest because the pace of learning is too slow. There is too much emphasis on imparting knowledge as opposed to encouraging them to question ideas or discuss opinions to extend their understanding. Teaching assistants and learning mentors are capable, competent, and highly valued members of the teaching team. They provide unobtrusive and sensitive support for children who have difficulties with aspects of their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. All subjects are adequately covered, but too much time is allocated to English. This time is not always used well enough; for example, in guided reading sessions, pupils are often given mundane tasks to complete. The school is beginning to adapt national guidelines to cater for the interests and enjoyment of its pupils. However, teachers' planning does not always take sufficient account of pupils' individual needs, especially for the more able. Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) is much improved since the last inspection, but there are too few opportunities for pupils to use their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills to support their learning in other subjects. The curriculum in the Foundation Stage meets the needs of the children well. However, the school is rightly looking to further develop the outdoor areas to provide a more attractive and purposeful learning environment.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall. The care and support provided for pupils are good. Pupils have strong and trusting relationships with adults. These support learning and personal development very well. The pupils are clear and confident

about whom they can turn to for help. Academic guidance is satisfactory. There are some examples of target setting and analytical marking, but these are inconsistent across the school. Too few pupils are clear about how to take the next steps in their learning or are involved in setting their own targets to reflect their perceived needs. Procedures for child protection are robust and the school takes health and safety issues very seriously. Most parents are confident that their children are cared for well. Pupils express a similar view. Good behaviour management systems result in good relationships throughout the school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The leadership of the headteacher is good. She demonstrates commitment to improve the standard of education provided. For example, policies are regularly reviewed and revised to improve them. She listens to and consults staff, governors, parents and children so that all feel involved in their school. The school's procedures for monitoring teaching and tracking pupils' progress are satisfactory. Both are becoming more rigorous and robust as the result of the work of the headteacher. She has produced a school improvement plan designed to take the school forward which communicates her vision and provides a clear direction for staff to follow. However, the plan does not always ensure that action taken to improve the effectiveness of the school impacts directly on pupils' learning. The school gathers a wealth of information about pupils' progress to ensure that they keep on track and move forward. However, there is insufficient analysis of this information to personalise learning for individuals so that they know exactly what to aim for in order to improve and maximise their progress.

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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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 very much for being so welcoming and friendly towards us during our recent visit to your school. We very much enjoyed the opportunity to talk with you and your teachers about how well you are doing. We thought you would like to know what we have said about your school, which we think is a satisfactory school.

You behave well and you are kind and considerate to each other. In lessons, you listen carefully to what your teachers have to tell you and you try hard. You enjoy coming to school and have many things to look forward to such as visits, visitors, and clubs. You told us that you feel safe in school and that any falling-out is quickly sorted out by the teachers. You told us about how you were involved in writing the school's behaviour code and the school motto, 'Learning and Growing together Hand in Hand'.

Your teachers look after you well and listen to what you have to say. They work hard to help you learn. It was a pleasure to see that the school has gained Active Mark Gold and Gold Award for Healthy Schools. This is a real achievement – well done!

We have made some suggestions to help the school get even better. We have asked your teachers look again at the school timetables to see if more time can be found for other subjects such as history, geography or PE by making some of your other lessons shorter and more exciting. When you have completed a piece of work, we would like your teachers to write in your books how you could make it even better and set you a target to work towards. We have also asked those teachers who are in charge of subjects to keep a careful check on your work in books and what you do in lessons.

Many things about your school are good and you, together with your teachers, can make it even better by making you do everything to the best of your ability. Please keep working hard and doing the best you can.

I wish you well in the future.