



Stow Heath Infant School and Resource Base for HI and MLD Pupils

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 104323
Local Authority Wolverhampton
Inspection number 286910
Inspection dates 6–7 February 2007
Reporting inspector Dorothy Bathgate HMI

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

Type of school	Infant	School address	Vaughan Road
School category	Community		Portobello
Age range of pupils	4–7		Willenhall WV13 3UD
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01902 558815
Number on roll (school)	298	Fax number	01902 558818
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mike Batchelor
		Headteacher	Vivienne Bunce
Date of previous school inspection	3 March 2003		

Age group 4–7	Inspection dates 6–7 February 2007	Inspection number 286910
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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

Stow Heath is a larger than average infant school situated on the outskirts of Wolverhampton and serves a significantly disadvantaged area. One third of the pupils are eligible for free school meals and a similar proportion have learning difficulties or disabilities. Since September 2005 the school has been re-designated by the local authority as a base for pupils with general learning difficulties. Prior to this, since 1985, the school had two separate bases on site for pupils with moderate learning difficulties and those with hearing impairment. The school is part of an Excellence in Cities Action Zone working in partnership with seven other schools. A quarter of the pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Pupils enter the school with levels of skills, knowledge and understanding which are well below average, and in some cases, extremely well below average.

A Children's Centre was established on the school site in August 2006 as part of the Sure Start initiative.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Stow Heath Infant School is a good school which makes a real difference to the lives of its pupils. Pupils enjoy school and they develop a love of learning which equips them successfully for the next stage of their education and for future adult life. The school works effectively with parents and carers, who have overwhelmingly positive views of the school. One parent said, 'Stow Heath is a brilliant school. The teachers are fair and friendly and are happy to help the children and parents at all times. I am proud to say my child attends Stow Heath Infant School.'

Although standards are very low, this is entirely due to the wide range of learners within school, the extremely low levels of skills, knowledge and understanding that pupils start school with, and the extent of some pupils' learning difficulties. Pupils make good progress and achieve well. Good progress is the result of good teaching and learning and the high standards of care and support provided. A wide range of learning experiences is planned to meet individual needs; however, some boys do not make as much progress as girls in reading and writing.

Rich learning experiences and a caring environment are central to the good progress pupils make in their personal development and well-being. Their behaviour is good because they enjoy their learning. A good curriculum, with a strong focus on developing pupils' speaking and listening skills, provides them with a strong basis for future learning. They are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles and the school has received the Healthy Schools award and the Active Mark award in recognition of its success. Attendance is average and the school actively promotes good attendance and punctuality. Pupils enjoy the opportunity to influence decision making in their school through the recently established school council, and play an active role within the wider community through a strong partnership with the local church.

Care, guidance and support are good. Support and guidance for the most vulnerable of pupils are of the highest quality and the school is very successful in removing the barriers that hinder progress. Skilled management of children with complex needs enables all to learn in a calm and supportive atmosphere. Recent improvements in marking are not yet consistently applied throughout the school and pupils do not have enough opportunities to be involved in assessing their own learning. Target setting is established in all subjects, but pupils do not always know or understand their targets.

The good progress the school has made since the last inspection reflects good leadership and management and demonstrates good capacity for further improvement. The headteacher provides an excellent role model which inspires a dedicated and enthusiastic team. The school has good systems for evaluating its effectiveness, and acts swiftly to bring about improvements in identified areas.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards of boys' reading and writing by adapting resources and teaching strategies appropriately, to engage and motivate them fully in their learning.

- Improve the use made of assessment by ensuring consistency in marking, developing pupils' self-evaluation opportunities and refining target setting.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils start school with skills, knowledge and understanding which are extremely low. Pupils make good progress overall in the Foundation Stage, with outstanding progress in personal, social and emotional development. A significant number of pupils who start school with very little knowledge of English make good progress in developing a range of vocabulary that supports their learning and enables them to communicate their ideas clearly. They are soon able to enjoy chatting with their friends, listen carefully, and respond appropriately to questions from their teachers. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are identified quickly and supported appropriately to ensure their learning moves on swiftly. High-attaining pupils also make good progress because they are set more challenging tasks. Although communication, language and literacy skills are still at an early stage of development for many pupils by the end of the Foundation stage, all pupils are well on their way to attaining expected standards in all other areas of learning.

Although standards at the end of Year 2 are well below average, pupils make good progress overall from their very low starting points, particularly in mathematics, where standards in national tests are close to average. Standards and achievement are currently good in Year 1. Pupils are developing a good understanding of numbers and the number system and are able to partition two-digit numbers into tens and units. A significant number of pupils in Year 1 and Year 2 are now making rapid progress with their reading as a result of new resources, innovative delivery of the literacy strategy, and effective intervention strategies. However, some boys achieve less well than girls. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress. This is because of the high quality support which they receive and the consistent way in which structures and systems are implemented by all staff working with them.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Stow Heath is a happy and welcoming school where a high priority is given to developing pupils' personal development and well-being. Good personal development and well-being are reflected in positive attitudes to learning, good behaviour in lessons and in the playground, and a strong sense of caring for one another. Pupils understand the importance of adopting a healthy lifestyle and enjoy regular exercise opportunities through the 'Huff and Puff' activities in the playground and the walk to school initiative. A range of healthy meal options, regular brain gym and access to drinking water throughout the day ensure that pupils' health needs are fully met. The members of the recently established school council are proud of the new playground signs that are a direct result of their work. Pupils have had major responsibility for organising fundraising events for the Blue Peter appeal. This has given them good insight into

planning, organising and financial management, in preparation for adult responsibilities and the world of work, although their key skills in literacy and numeracy are low.

The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. Moral and social development are outstanding because of the excellent relationships which exist at every level, the positive encouragement for pupils to help each other and value differences, and the strong focus on developing high self-esteem. Assembly time is an important part of each day for the whole-school community. An appropriate balance of enthusiastic singing, time for thinking and quiet reflective moments is led imaginatively, yet sensitively, in this multi-cultural school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Stimulating activities are at the heart of good teaching and learning. Staff in the Foundation Stage have an excellent understanding of the needs of these very young children. The environment is attractive and stimulating and staff plan activities exceptionally well to meet the wide range of learners' needs. No opportunities for learning are missed and children were observed counting puzzle pieces as they tidied them away into the box. In all classrooms there are positive relationships where children thrive on the high levels of trust and care which boost their self-confidence. Pupils are not afraid to make mistakes and they learn from them. Another feature in all classrooms is the good use of questioning where pupils are given time to think and explore their ideas, often through paired discussion. However, some boys are less well motivated than the girls and consequently their progress is not as good. Recent investment in more appropriate resources for boys has begun to improve their motivation and confidence. However, some resources and teaching strategies do not do enough to engage all the boys fully in their learning.

Teaching assistants have a good impact on learning, especially when working with individual pupils or with small groups. They have good subject knowledge, especially in language development, and respond to pupils' needs with appropriate support and challenge.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and offers pupils a wide range of opportunities, including an overnight residential experience for Year 2 pupils. The timetable is planned and organised imaginatively to match the needs of all pupils. Intervention programmes are highly successful at raising the achievement of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities. Exciting and innovative strategies to motivate and engage pupils at all levels are having a positive impact on raising standards. An outstanding 'Write Dance' session with Reception and Year 1 pupils was successful in developing pupils' confidence in pencil control and letter formation through dance and movement. Pupils enjoy the

topic work which provides many opportunities for work across a range of different subjects. During a Year 2 art session, pupils developed their observational drawing skills using stones, shells and bark to link with their science work on natural materials. A small number of after-school activities and clubs are available, such as ocarina playing and choir.

The high quality Foundation Stage curriculum provides a strong basis for independent learning, and the well-developed outdoor play ensures that the children learn how to co-operate effectively.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good overall, with pastoral care being outstanding. Pupils and their parents agree that children are looked after exceptionally well. The school is very well staffed with highly skilled teaching assistants who work closely with teachers to support targeted groups of pupils and individuals. Support for individual pupils and those with learning difficulties or disabilities is extremely well coordinated. Pupils working one-to-one with teaching assistants feel secure and so they gain confidence and make very good progress towards becoming independent learners. Pupils say that they feel safe in the classrooms and in the playground. Difficulties with lunchtime arrangements, because of a shared dining hall facility with the Junior School, are dealt with effectively to ensure that pupils enjoy a positive lunchtime experience. Midday supervisors demonstrate a high standard of care. Child protection procedures are fully in place.

Academic guidance and support are currently under review. The school has already identified that assessment for learning is an area for development. Simple methods of marking and opportunities for pupils to assess their own learning through the use of smiley and straight faces are beginning to help pupils understand how well they are doing. In some classes, opportunities for pupils to assess their own work are better because the teachers are skilful at leading discussion at the end of lessons, and make effective use of prompt cards. However, these are not yet consistently applied throughout the school and therefore their impact is limited. Targets set by teachers in literacy and numeracy are often not understood by pupils because they are not expressed in child-friendly language that they can understand.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good in this highly inclusive school where all pupils are encouraged and helped to succeed. The headteacher has successfully built a strong team who show great commitment to school improvement. They are effective at setting the strategic direction of the school and determining the priorities for future development. The leadership has created a vibrant, happy ethos which is reflected in the imaginative curriculum and stimulating teaching. As a result, children of all backgrounds and abilities make good progress. Governors offer considerable support.

The newly appointed chair of governors is keen to develop the role of the governing body further through greater involvement in assessing and monitoring the school's work. The school has tackled the issues from the last inspection and demonstrates good capacity for future improvement.

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

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	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
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?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
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 welcoming me to your school when I visited you recently. I enjoyed meeting you very much and you helped me to find out lots of things about your school. Many of you told me that you really enjoy coming to school and some of you even wish you could come at the weekends!

Stow Heath is a good school. I was pleased to see you all enjoying your learning and making good progress. Your behaviour is good and you all get on well together. I particularly enjoyed meeting lots of 'Wizard Learners' in the corridor, dressed in their wizard costumes and flying off to tell Miss Bunce about their special work. I also enjoyed your enthusiastic singing in assembly and it was a very special treat to hear the choir singing. All the staff take good care of you and you feel safe both in class and outside in the playground. Many of you told me that you enjoy the 'Huff and Puff' activities at playtime and they help to keep you fit and healthy.

Even good schools can get better and so I have asked Miss Bunce to try and improve some things for you at Stow Heath. Some boys do not enjoy their work quite as much as the girls and therefore they do not make as good progress. Miss Bunce and the teachers are going to try and make sure that they choose equipment and topics that boys will really enjoy to help them do as well as the girls. When the teachers mark the work in your books, they are going to tell how to make your work better. They will also be finding different ways to help you think more carefully about how well you have understood each lesson. The teachers will be explaining your targets to you in more easy-to-understand language.

Miss Bunce and the teachers will need you to help them. You can help them especially by being good listeners and trying hard all the time. Make sure you look at what the teachers write in your books and listen carefully when they tell you what you need to do to improve your work. Be honest about what you understand in your lessons and what you could do even better. Finally, make sure you know and understand your targets.

Keep up the good work and thank you for talking to me. I really enjoyed my visit.