

Robins Lane Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104762
Local Authority	St. Helens
Inspection number	287025
Inspection date	14 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Frank Ravey

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	253
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs L Bate
Headteacher	Mrs Anne Morten
Date of previous school inspection	3 February 2003
School address	Robins Lane St Helens Merseyside WA9 3NF
Telephone number	01744 678503
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Robins Lane is an average sized primary school that serves an area of significant social disadvantage. The number of pupils entitled to free school meals is double the national average and nearly half the pupils on roll are identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school provides for a small number of vulnerable pupils. Nearly all pupils on roll are of White British heritage and none are at the early stages of learning English as an additional language. The school provides a breakfast club and 'wrap-around care' facilities. It has the Basic Skills Quality Mark, the ActiveMark Gold Award and a National Healthy Schools Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school because everyone involved with it works purposefully, enthusiastically and very thoroughly in order to make sure pupils get the most out of their education. Everybody knows just what they need to do - and they do it very well. The result is pupils who achieve outstandingly well and develop into mature and confident young people.

Pupils make outstanding progress right through the school because they are taught very well and provided with an outstanding curriculum in which they take part in exciting learning activities that are very carefully planned to develop important skills in a way that fires pupils' enthusiasm and hence makes their learning very effective. This begins in the Foundation Stage, where children start with standards that are well below the levels expected for their age. They are presented with a wonderful learning environment and activities that are carefully planned to help them start growing into thoughtful, 'switched on', independent learners. Meticulous individual assessment means staff are fully aware of what children need to do next in their learning. Through Years 1 to 6, a similarly attractive learning environment is presented and pupils benefit greatly. Consistently effective teaching built upon the strong foundations of very good relationships and high expectations means that pupils continue to progress very well. Their personal and social skills develop as well as their academic ones and by the end of Year 6, they reach broadly average standards overall, with standards in mathematics being above average. However, the school recognises that standards in writing, although improved thanks to careful and innovative curriculum planning, still lag a little behind those in other subjects and could be higher.

The school has a large proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and a small number are particularly vulnerable. High quality planned support for learning means that all these pupils achieve just as well as others. The personal care and support they receive provides the sense of security and well-being that forms the foundation for their success and is just one example of the outstanding care, guidance and support the school provides. In the recent past, the attendance of a small minority of pupils has been a problem. The school is working very hard to improve this, but recognises that attendance should still be higher.

'My child comes to school with a smile on his face!' commented one parent - and there are plenty of smiles evident around Robins Lane School. Children clearly enjoy school very much and talk enthusiastically about the chances they have to go on visits and to help others as 'Playground Pals'. They tuck into the healthy food provided for them and show great responsibility in taking charge of the daily 'Munch Box', where healthy snacks can be bought.

All the school's good outcomes ultimately track back to outstanding leadership and management that give the school excellent capacity to improve further. In this school, leadership is exercised by many staff in many different ways, but they all have one thing in common - making sure children have the best chance to succeed. The headteacher enables all this to happen as well as providing her own very strong and purposeful leadership that sets the tone for the rest of the school. With the very good support of other senior leaders and school managers, the school runs smoothly but with a great sense of enjoyment and purpose. The large majority of parents speak entirely positively of its work. 'The all round experience is very good,' said another parent - and that sums up perfectly why this school gives outstanding value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing throughout the school.
- Improve attendance.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Children start in the Nursery class with standards that are well below expectations for their age. Standards are particularly low in language and literacy, but are a little higher in mathematics. Children also start with limited social skills for their age. Thanks to a very well organised curriculum and very good teaching, children make rapid progress, although many are still working towards the nationally expected standards by the end of the Foundation Stage. Through Years 1 to 6, pupils steadily get closer to the standards expected of them nationally, achieving outstandingly well in so doing. This is because they receive consistently strong teaching that provides a good balance between challenge, to stretch them to the next level in learning, and support, especially for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The cumulative effect of this very good provision is outstanding progress by all groups of pupils so that by the end of Year 6, pupils have reached broadly average standards, albeit a little higher than the national average figures. In mathematics, from a slightly higher starting point in Nursery, pupils reach above average standards. Only in writing should standards be higher, although the school has made good strides towards improvement due to its stimulating approach to developing key learning skills through other subjects. Examples of pupils' work on display throughout the school point to very good achievement in art and design and show that the school's focus is broader than the basics skills.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being are good with some outstanding aspects. A feature of lessons is how much pupils enjoy their learning. They are eager to take part and they work particularly well together in small groups evidence of their very well developed social skills. Behaviour in lessons is very good and only very rarely is it a little less than good at other times. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. In addition to very good skills of social interaction, pupils show a strong sense of responsibility, talking avidly about what they do to help others as 'Playground Pals' and 'Activity Leaders'. They also show good appreciation of other cultures, helped by the school's curriculum practice of 'themed weeks' that sometimes have a multicultural focus. A strong sense of community awareness extends from within the school to the wider world. In practical terms this awareness is seen in the 'Robins Lane Art Train' project, in which pupils and parents, with the help of a visiting artist, painted a wonderful mural on a blank wall opposite the school's car park. One aspect of the mural was healthy foods - testament to pupils' very good understanding of how to keep healthy. The school has worked hard to improve attendance, but acknowledges that it should be higher as a problem still remains with unauthorised absence.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning are outstanding. Shared strengths in teaching are the very good relationships teachers establish with pupils, the high expectations of how hard pupils should work and what they should achieve and the very good support provided for pupils who need it. Surrounding all these is a very well crafted, imaginative learning environment. From stepping into a cool and green 'natural world' in the Nursery class to the 'big top' in Year 6, teachers and support staff work very hard to make learning surroundings exciting and meaningful. Displays in communal areas have the same effect. As a result, pupils learn consistently well and this builds up over time into outstanding progress. Very thorough assessment of pupils' progress starts in the Foundation Stage and continues through the school, helping to keep pupils 'on track'. Conscientious marking points the ways for pupils to improve their work. Imaginative homework projects build very good links with home, involving parents in projects such as designing and modelling 'Our Dream Gardens', with wonderful results!

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum in the Foundation Stage gives pupils an excellent introduction to learning, laying the basis for the development of key skills that are nurtured successfully throughout the school. The school is embracing recent curriculum innovations with enthusiasm and great success, for example, by developing pupils' skills of writing through work in other subjects such as history and geography. This adds to the effectiveness of a sharp focus on developing basic skills of literacy and numeracy whilst underlining the school's commitment to giving its pupils a broad education. The impact is seen in pupils' outstanding progress and achievement. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is based upon tailoring the curriculum to meet individual needs and this works very well, with these pupils making just as good progress as others. A good programme of out-of-school activities and an exciting range of visitors to the school provide more opportunities for pupils to develop their skills and knowledge. Strong partnerships with outside agencies and commercial organisations further enhance the curriculum. The school's flexible, 'hands on' approach to learning is typified by a recent production of 'A Midsummer night's Dream' by Year 6 pupils, who designed their costumes and worked on the project in a block of time set aside for it.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school cares very well for its pupils. This is evident in the happy faces seen all around the school and in pupils' view that they are safe in school. Procedures for safeguarding pupils conform to the recent requirements. The work of the learning mentor is very influential in providing support for individual pupils and, in particular, for those pupils who are vulnerable. Outstanding personal and academic support for pupils with learning difficulties is firmly grounded in detailed intervention strategies that ensure pupils' well-being is promoted and that any who have fallen behind in their learning quickly make up lost ground. Very strong links with support agencies further enhance the support provided. Very detailed tracking of pupils' progress leads to the development of individual learning targets that help pupils improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The school's leadership and management have 'strength in depth'. The headteacher is very knowledgeable about the work of the school and has built a very strong staff team that is focused on one thing - helping pupils to get the most out of their education. Her influence is seen throughout this very successful school. She has helped many staff to develop as 'leaders' and this means that the school has a very detailed and accurate view of its work. Senior leaders engage in very thorough monitoring of provision to provide a very clear and accurate picture of the school's strengths and areas for development. A strong focus on 'Every Child Matters' ensures a rounded view of school development and a very successful focus on ensuring equality of opportunity for all pupils. Surprisingly, the school rated its performance less highly overall than the inspection, although this seems more due to a very rigorous view of excellence than a misjudgement of performance. The governing body is effectively involved in checking and supporting the work of school leaders as well as holding them to account for their performance. Governors know the school very well. Financial management is efficient and the school runs very smoothly.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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	3
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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
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	2

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.

Annex A

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 your help when I visited your school recently. It really was a pleasure to walk around the school, join you in lessons and speak to so many people who work at Robins Lane and help to make it such a great place to learn. At the end of my visit I came to the conclusion that it is an outstanding school. Of course, you play a very important part in making this so, through your very hard work and the responsible way you go about life in school. Your teachers and other staff also do very well to help you make outstanding progress and learn so much. I agree with those of you who told me how many interesting things you do in school. I was very impressed with the way you take on various responsibilities such as 'Playground Pals' and 'Activity Leaders' and how well you look after the 'Munch Box'. I very much enjoyed my cheese on toast from there!

I think you get lots of very exciting and interesting learning opportunities and that you do well in most subjects. I agree with your teachers that you could do even better in writing and that a small number of you should attend school more often - not being in school means you can miss so many interesting things.

I'm sure you will continue to work hard and do well. Just do that little bit better in your writing and you will help your school to improve even more.