



Bleak Hill Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 104773
Local Authority St. Helens
Inspection number 287029
Inspection date 7 November 2006
Reporting inspector Paul Bamber

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Hamilton Road
School category	Community		Windle, St Helens
Age range of pupils	4-11		Merseyside WA10 6HG
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01744 678190
Number on roll (school)	479	Fax number	01744 678191
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Canon G Almond
		Headteacher	Mr Ian Wellens
Date of previous school inspection	17 June 2002		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Many pupils at this larger than average and over subscribed school come from relatively advantaged backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below average and few take a free school meal. Very few pupils use English as an additional language and most are of White British heritage. The school is in receipt of many awards including Investors in People, Basic skills, the ArtsMark and ActiveMark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

'I cannot endorse Bleak Hill's professionalism and commitment to pupils' needs and development enough.'

'The school provides a high standard of education, expectations and a wide variety of experiences.'

'All my children have had an excellent standard of education and they have developed into strong, respectful and confident young people.'

These are just three of the comments, among many, from the overwhelmingly supportive parents that encapsulate this outstanding school.

Teaching is of high quality, enabling pupils to attain high standards and make excellent progress throughout the school. The children in the Reception classes have a super start to their education because their curriculum is exciting and the staff have high expectations that they will shine in all areas of their learning. In Years 1 to 6, teaching and learning continue to be at least good and often outstanding. Pupils respond extremely positively to teachers' high expectations of the quality and quantity of work they should produce. As a result, pupils' basic skills are excellent. They reach high standards in national assessments with pupils achieving outstandingly. While boys' writing is much better than their peers nationally, the school acknowledges that the gap between boys' and girls' performance could be reduced.

The combination of excellent, specialist teaching and a very creative, enriching curriculum means that pupils' achievements in the arts and in sport are exceptionally good. This is because most appropriate provision is made for all pupils including those recognised as gifted and talented. The exemplary way in which pupils behave, and their extremely positive attitudes to all that the school offers, play a highly significant role in their excellent achievements and in the fact that they grow into mature young citizens. Strange then, given the otherwise excellent provision for pupils' personal development, that only Year 6 pupils are members of the school council. The quality of the relationships that exist throughout the school underpin the supportive ethos that is such an important feature of the school, both in and out of the classroom. Pupils feel very safe and secure because of the high quality of care and support provided by all staff. The warm and effective support provided to those pupils who find learning more difficult than most has a very positive impact on their self-esteem and achievements.

The excellence of the school's standards, achievements and provision would not exist without the outstanding contribution of the headteacher, governors and senior staff. Because there is a united determination that the school will continue to improve, and a shared vision of how that will be achieved, there is no complacency. Rigorous systems to check on pupils' and teachers' performance allied to challenging setting of targets, ensure that all are kept on their toes and that standards and achievement continue to improve. The school knows itself very well and is very aware of what it needs to do to improve further. Despite this, it is not sharp enough in its planning in identifying

success criteria that will result in specific, measurable outcomes related to pupils' improved performance. There has been good improvement since the last inspection and the school is in an excellent position to improve even further and to continue to offer outstanding value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that improvement plans identify specific and measurable outcomes for pupils' better performance.
- Narrow the gap between boys' and girls' performance in writing.
- Widen the membership of the school council beyond Year 6 so that more pupils can have a voice and contribute in a formal way to the running of the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

In the Reception classes, children make excellent progress in all areas of their learning and many enter Year 1 having exceeded national expectations. They continue to make excellent progress through Years 1 to 6. In 2005, the proportion of pupils attaining at higher levels in the Year 2 teacher assessments indicated some underachievement by more-able pupils. The school's senior management acted swiftly to analyse why and to implement strategies to eliminate the weaknesses contributing to this relative underperformance. As a result, a much higher proportion achieved Level 3 in all subjects in the 2006 assessments. Standards are high in Years 3 to 6 with the challenging targets for Year 6 performance in the national tests consistently met or exceeded. Pupils who have particular gifts or talents and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve equally as well as others because of the excellent provision made for them.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They are aware of and practise healthy lifestyles and take responsibility willingly and seriously. They have a genuine concern for the environment and for those less fortunate than themselves. Pupils demonstrate by their excellent attendance and punctuality how much they enjoy school. Their attitude in lessons is most positive and they eagerly participate in the wide range of out of class activities available to them. By working effectively in pairs and teams and by accepting challenges, in and out of the classroom, pupils demonstrate very well those life skills that will stand them in good stead in the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The consistently good and often outstanding quality of teaching and learning contributes significantly to pupils' high standards and excellent achievements. Lessons are well ordered and purposeful. Pupils clearly very much enjoy learning and taking on fresh challenges. Teachers consistently set high standards and expect pupils to work hard and to strive for improvement. Excellent relationships, very creative use of resources, including information and communication technology, and well matched tasks exemplify much of the teaching. Pupils learn extremely well because they know exactly what they will be expected to do in lessons and they are given many opportunities to learn from each other. Throughout the school, pupils' knowledge of how to improve their writing is considerably enhanced by teachers' very rigorous marking and setting of targets. Teaching assistants forge very effective partnerships with class or specialist teachers and make a considerable contribution to pupils' learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding because it fully meets the needs of all pupils so well. It promotes excellent basic skills, provides pupils with considerable enrichment and very effectively ensures that pupils become valuable members of their community. The rich variety of visits, visitors and out of class activities provided for pupils adds great value to their achievements, their personal development and to their appreciation of the value of good health and of the arts. The curriculum is particularly effective in meeting the needs of those pupils who have a special talent or gift by providing special workshops or specialist teaching.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Pupils are extremely well cared for and supported. A pupil said, 'I can't explain exactly why, but I feel really safe and secure in this school.' Factors which may well influence this view are that procedures to ensure child protection, to safeguard children and to secure the premises are all firmly in place. Pupils report they can talk confidentially over any concerns or worries with adults. The recently introduced breakfast and after school clubs provide much appreciated provision for parents and are greatly enjoyed by pupils. Regular assessments ensure that potential risks in and around the school are kept to a minimum. The academic guidance provided for pupils is outstanding. Their progress is very rigorously tracked and they are made well aware of how they can improve their work. If pupils are for any reason falling behind this is picked up quickly and swift action taken to help them catch up.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The school is rather modest in its view of the quality of leadership and management. Leaders and managers play a major role in making this an outstanding school. Their clarity of vision and very effective actions to constantly improve standards, pupils' achievements and provision contribute greatly to how well teachers teach and pupils learn. Rigorous systems are used to check on and improve performance throughout the school. However, improvement plans lack sufficient detail about how exactly pupils' performance will improve as a result of actions taken. The very positive partnerships the school has with parents, the local authority, other schools and the local community enhance many areas of the school's work. For instance, it was the lobbying by parents that persuaded the school to arrange for extended provision for pupils before and after school.

Governors are very influential in school life and are very knowledgeable about the standards and provision. Several actively support pupils' learning on a regular basis. Governors, the headteacher, deputy headteacher and other senior staff set a most positive role model for pupils and staff. They have played a notable role in ensuring the very positive ethos that prevails.

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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?	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	1
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
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	1

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.

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	1
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 making me so welcome during the day I spent in your school. I very much enjoyed my visit and would like to share with you those things that are really excellent about your school.

What is excellent about your school.

- All of you do extremely well in your work and enjoy the many extra activities provided for you.
- You have very good teachers and all the adults who work with you help you to make excellent progress and look after you very well.
- You behave extremely well.
- Because you have quite a lot of specialist teachers you do particularly well in art and design, music and sport.
- Mr Wellens and the other people who run the school keep everyone on their toes and know exactly what the school needs to do to get even better.

There are a few things I have asked Mr Wellens and the staff to do.

- To tell you exactly how you will improve because of the changes they plan to make in how you are taught and what you will learn.
- To help Year 6 boys do even better in their writing so that they do as well as the girls.
- To make sure that pupils from classes other than Year 6 can be members of the school council so that they can have more say in what goes on in the school.

Thank you for helping me with the inspection of your school. I hope that you continue to really enjoy school and do very well with your work.