



Lark Hill Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 106056
Local Authority Stockport
Inspection number 287400
Inspection dates 11–12 October 2006
Reporting inspector Christopher Griffin

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Northgate Road
School category	Community		Edgeley, Stockport
Age range of pupils	4–11		Cheshire SK3 9PH
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0161 4806295
Number on roll (school)	155	Fax number	0161 4779489
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Richard Coaton
		Headteacher	Mrs Hazel Williams
Date of previous school inspection	27 January 2003		

Age group 4–11	Inspection dates 11–12 October 2006	Inspection number 287400
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Lark Hill is a smaller than average primary school with extended school status serving an area with some significant social and economic disadvantage. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average. The number of pupils on roll has been falling in recent years and this has led to reductions in staffing. Most pupils are of White British heritage. The school has an above average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and an above average percentage of pupils with statements of special educational need.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Lark Hill School provides a good standard of education and good value for money. The school provides a welcoming and supportive environment, for pupils, parents and the community. Pupils' attainment on entry to the Reception class is below the levels expected and sometimes well below, with many pupils having considerable learning difficulties. However, achievement is good because the school puts into place methods that are carefully aimed at supporting the pupils' progress in their personal development, attitudes to learning and in their basic skills. The headteacher, who has been in post for two years, knows the school and its community very well and has a long-standing commitment to both. She is effectively leading the introduction of new initiatives to improve teaching and learning. Her educational vision ensures that every child feels valued.

The stimulating and well structured environment of the Reception class gives the children a good start to their education. They receive a good grounding that enables them to develop good independence and make good progress in the steady acquisition of very basic language and communication skills from a low base. Good progress throughout the school means that Year 6 pupils are now reaching broadly average standards. This is better than would be expected, given their low starting points. Recent improvements reflect better teaching and learning that focuses effectively on what the pupils need to improve, especially in their writing skills. Pupils have a good understanding of their targets in English but this is not as well developed in mathematics and science and there is room for them to do better. Opportunities for extending speaking skills are also not consistently taken.

Some features of the pupils' personal development are outstanding, especially their enthusiastic contributions to the life of the school and their commitment to a healthy lifestyle. Pupils talk enthusiastically about their life at school and the way it is enriched by a well planned curriculum and a good range of extra curricular activities. In lessons they work hard and with pride. There are some very good features in the quality of care of all pupils. The school provides good support for both their learning and emotional needs. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and the efforts it makes. As one said, 'Nothing is too much trouble'.

The headteacher has a secure understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement, but inspectors found some of her judgements about the school's effectiveness overgenerous. She makes perceptive observations about the quality of teaching and learning but recognizes the need to extend this expertise to her subject coordinators. She has overseen good developments in the use of assessment which are helping to raise standards, but these are not yet fully embedded, especially in mathematics and science. However, the improved Year 6 results, sustained improvement since the last inspection, the positive climate for learning and the renewed emphasis on raising standards, all indicate a good capacity to improve. The governing body has a sound knowledge of the school's strengths and challenges.

What the school should do to improve further

- Give pupils clear knowledge and understanding of their individual learning targets in mathematics and science so that they know how to improve their work.
- Develop the role of subject coordinators in evaluating the effectiveness of teaching and learning to raise achievement further.
- Provide more opportunities in lessons to develop the pupils' speaking skills.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

All pupils achieve well throughout the school. Overall attainment on entry to the Reception class is below average and in some years it is particularly low. The fluctuations from year to year are the result of differing numbers of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Detailed assessments show that their early reading and writing skills are weaker than their number work. Inspection evidence shows that pupils make good progress in the Reception class and Key Stage 1. The steady acquisition and consolidation of those very basic, essential skills for learning that many lack on entry is a very effective strategy. Pupils thus gain a solid foundation for sustained good progress in Key Stage 2. Much improved results in the 2006 Year 6 national tests showed broadly average standards and pupils reaching challenging targets. Pupils did particularly well in mathematics, where almost half the pupils reached the higher Level 5. Good improvements have been made in reading and writing but more remains to be done to improve the pupils' speaking skills. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because of the effective support they have from skilled members of staff.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Their commitment to a healthy lifestyle and their contribution to the school community are outstanding. Pupils enjoy their lessons and are enthusiastic learners, responding positively to the rewards for being 'clever, busy and caring'. They like school very much and feel very well looked after and safe. They understand the need to be careful and caring in lessons and the playground. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Older pupils show a very mature sense of responsibility by fulfilling a wide range of helpful jobs such as school prefect, head boy and head girl, managers of the art gallery, 'drip busters' and 'dinner dicers'. Pupils thrive on these responsibilities and their self-esteem grows. The children's council gives pupils good experiences of decision making and is good preparation for later life. Healthy eating and physical exercise are very actively promoted and supported. Older and younger pupils mix happily together at playtimes. The older play leaders help younger children to enjoy active purposeful play. Behaviour in lessons and at playtime is good. Many parents, carers and grandparents commend the children's caring attitudes. Attendance is satisfactory and punctuality good.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress as a result of good, thoughtfully planned teaching. Teachers identify and share clear learning aims which give lessons a good sense of purpose and contribute to pace. Strengths are clearly evident in the teachers' good use of engaging learning activities that catch and keep the pupils' interests: for example, the use of a puppet who could not count properly to ten and dressing up to role play the lives of eighteenth century sailors suffering from scurvy. The overall mix of clarity of purpose and busy activities leads to good behaviour with pupils working hard. Clear expectations in the Reception class give a good, supportive introduction to school life and help children feel secure. Teaching assistants have good knowledge of the needs of the children they are responsible for and their good support helps them to progress well. In lessons some opportunities are missed to challenge and develop the pupils' skills in discussion. This usually stems from a narrow style of questioning that does not encourage or sustain more open responses. Marking is mainly good and gives good feedback on strengths and areas for improvement.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school's curriculum offers a good balance between improving academic skills and personal and social development. The carefully planned emphasis on improving writing skills has had a good impact on progress. However, more remains to be done to extend the pupils' speaking skills through drama and discussion. Planning makes sure pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who are gifted and talented do work that suits their needs and this leads to good progress. A good range of educational visits, and visitors to the school especially for history, the arts and environmental studies, enrich the curriculum, as do formally taught French lessons. A good range of lunchtime and after school clubs for sport, music and art are popular. A well attended homework club helps pupils keep on top of their work. Children in the Foundation Stage enjoy a rich curriculum, learning through play both indoors and outdoors. Their entry into Year 1 is carefully planned so pupils have a curriculum that suits their needs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care and support for pupils are very good, helping pupils overcome barriers to learning. Support and personal guidance for all, including pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or with gifts and talents, are exceptional. Teaching assistants and the learning mentor are skilled and patient. The school links effectively with many outside agencies to help the pupils. Recent successful initiatives mean the pupils are clear about what they need to do to improve in reading and writing. This

good practice has not spread to mathematics and science, so pupils are less clear about their next steps in learning to help them do better in these subjects. The parents' overwhelming support for the school reflects the school's support for parents as well as its care for children. Procedures for child protection and vetting of all staff and volunteers are in place. Increasing links with the on-site nursery are helping both schools work together for the pupils benefit.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher sets a challenging agenda that is successfully raising achievement, as shown by improvements in Year 6 results. She is very well supported by her colleagues at all levels in pursuit of her vision for the school. The school improvement plan is based on a sound analysis of what needs to be better. Recent developments such as better use of assessment information to set targets for literacy and track progress are leading to better achievement, but are not embedded widely enough. There are good features in monitoring. Coordinators are using their improved analysis of test results to plan more suitable work. The headteacher's programme of lesson observations clearly identifies strengths and weaknesses in teaching, but she has correctly identified the need to enhance the lesson observation skills of coordinators and other colleagues. The headteacher's principle that each child deserves the best the school can offer drives the work of all adults in the school. Funding is well managed, with any surplus put to effective use, such as increased support for those with learning difficulties. The governing body has a sound grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

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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	3
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	3
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	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?	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	3
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 for the welcome you gave us when we came to your school. We liked talking with you. You gave us a lot of help. I was also impressed by the questions that many of you asked me at the children's council meeting. You will be pleased to know that we think Lark Hill is a good school. We think the following things are really good.

- You are happy and are very proud to be Lark Hill pupils. Your parents like the school a lot too.
- You carry out jobs and tasks in a grown up way, especially the caring way older children look after the younger ones.
- Your headteacher and all the other grown-ups in the school take really good care of you and make sure you are safe.
- Your teachers help you to learn well and make good progress. Those who find learning hard have extra help and also do well.
- You have lots of extra activities that you find fun and help you to learn.
- The school has a good headteacher who gets good support from the other staff.

We have asked your teachers to improve some things and we are sure you will want to help them do this.

- Give you a clearer idea of how to improve your work, especially in mathematics and science.
- The teachers to develop a clearer idea of how well you are learning in lessons.
- To help you have more chances to improve your skills when you discuss things.

You are right to be proud of your school and I wish you every success in the future.