

Holden Clough Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106216
Local Authority	Tameside
Inspection number	287445
Inspection dates	14–15 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Suzi Clipson-Boyles HMI

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	285
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Barbara Wilde
Headteacher	Mrs Beverley McGowan
Date of previous school inspection	3 March 2003
School address	St Albans Avenue Ashton-under-Lyne Lancashire OL6 8XN
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

The school is larger than many primary schools and is situated on the outskirts of the town. Most children live in privately owned housing and the socio-economic levels of the area are higher than the average. There are very few children who are eligible for free school meals. Around 13% of the children are Asian British Pakistani, 13% Asian British Indian and the rest are White British. Approximately 20% of children start Nursery with English as an additional language. The proportion of children with learning disabilities and/or difficulties is much lower than that in most primary schools as is the number of children with statements of special educational need. Additional day care is provided before and after school by a private provider. This is subject to a separate inspection by Ofsted.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This school is a happy and safe place for children. It has a warm family atmosphere and adults and children have positive relationships that promote children's good personal development and well-being. The diversity of cultures enriches the school and incidents of bullying and racism are rare. Children's behaviour is outstanding in this inclusive environment and they play and work happily with one another. These outcomes are the result of good care, guidance and support which are strengths of the school. However, standards and achievement are only satisfactory. For some years standards have been falling in Key Stage 1, although the trend has been halted this year. Progress varies from class to class, but overall it is satisfactory. The school therefore provides a satisfactory education.

In the Foundation Stage Unit, good provision and well planned learning opportunities lead to good progress. In the main school, progress is uneven according to the quality of the teaching in different classes. In some classes it is good and in others it is satisfactory. Some teachers give the same work to all the children, so for some it is too hard and for others it is too easy. By the end of Year 6 children are slightly above the national average for English, mathematics and science. This represents satisfactory progress because their starting points in Year 1 were already above the national expectations for their age. The quality of marking varies from class to class and the school policy does not give clear guidance on how marking should help children to improve their work. In some classes, the higher ability children are underachieving, particularly further down the school. There is no school register or policy on special provision for gifted and talented children.

The school's leadership and management are satisfactory. The self-evaluation has accurately identified where things need to improve and good work has started in various areas. The headteacher has taken a firm lead on this and her assessment of how well the school is performing was in line with the inspection judgements except for capacity to improve which the school thought was good. There is insufficient evidence of impact in important areas to uphold this grading. Improvement has been too slow since the last inspection. However, there are clear signs that new initiatives are starting to make a difference. For instance, staff training and new classroom approaches have resulted in extensive changes to the teaching of writing. This has clearly had a positive impact on the children's work because progress in writing since September is good in all classes. The subject has been led well by the teacher responsible for English. In other subjects, teachers keep careful records of how children are doing, but there are rather too many systems which can sometimes lead to inconsistency.

Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress in the school because they are well supported, particularly by teaching assistants. Likewise, children who start school with little or no English do very well. The vast majority of parents are full of praise for the school and appreciate all that the staff do for their children.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all lessons are planned so that children are learning at different levels according to their needs.
- Develop a whole school approach to challenging higher ability children.
- Review the current marking and assessment policy so that teachers are consistent and children understand their next steps for learning.

- Build on the current good practice in English so that all subjects are checked and assessed consistently by subject leaders.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement and standards are satisfactory. When children start in the Nursery, most are at the expected starting points for their age in most areas of learning. Around one fifth do not speak English as their first language and need additional support with language. All children are ready and willing to learn and parents are very supportive. During their two years in the Foundation Stage Unit they make good progress particularly in language. Teacher assessments show that by the end of Reception children have reached standards that are just above the national expectations. By the end of Year 6 children are also just above the national averages having made satisfactory progress overall. As they move from class to class, the rates of progress are uneven. In some classes, they make much faster progress and start to race ahead. In other classes children's progress is slower. Higher ability children at Holden Clough are not achieving well enough, particularly in Years 1, 3 and 4. They are extremely keen to learn and many say the work is too easy. However, there are clear signs that things are starting to change. The school's focus on improving writing has already had a considerable impact since the start of this academic year and progress in this subject has been good throughout the school. The decline in standards in English, mathematics and science at the end of Key Stage 1 has been halted this year. The work in books shows that the current Year 2 children have made good progress since September. Likewise, the current Year 6 children are reaching challenging targets in class. Throughout the school, children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress as do children who speak English as their second language.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being are good. Children are keen to tell you how much they enjoy their time at Holden Clough. They are happy, confident and sociable. Behaviour is exemplary in lessons and in the playground. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is particularly good. Friends from different cultural backgrounds work and play extremely well together and there is an inclusive ethos throughout the school. Children are thoughtful and reflective. They also have positive attitudes to sports such as netball and football and understand well how this helps to keep them healthy. The school council has successfully recommended that crisps and sweets be changed for the healthier options of fruit and vegetables. This emphasis on the healthier diet extends to school dinners, where pupils enjoy choosing from a healthy salad bar and eating vegetables grown in the school's own allotment. Bullying is not tolerated and a role play session led by the school council made the case that bullying is unacceptable at Holden Clough. Incidents are rare. Children say that if they do have any worries, they can share them with an adult who will take action if necessary. They therefore feel safe and secure in school. Attendance is good and children have positive attitudes to learning. However, where lessons are too passive and formal, they do not always reach their full potential. The children develop good social skills for the future, for instance they can work collaboratively and love to take on special responsibilities. Preparation for children's future working lives is satisfactory, although more able children are not always learning at a high enough level.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall but there is a mixed picture. In the Foundation Stage it is good. Children are given a range of interesting learning activities from which to choose. The environment is stimulating but calm and orderly. Adults observe and record progress carefully so that they can extend learning according to individual needs. Throughout the rest of the school the teaching is better in some classes than others. This directly affects progress. Where teaching is good, the children are clear about what they are learning and groups work at different levels of difficulty according to their learning needs. Teachers make effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance learning. There are opportunities for children to work together in pairs or groups to discuss their ideas and solve problems collaboratively. Children have more fun in good lessons. Where teaching is merely satisfactory the work is the same for everyone. Children sit for too long on the carpet listening to the teacher which limits the time to work independently, explore ideas and develop thinking skills. Very few teachers use resources or visual aids to add a more practical dimension to the lesson. Marking is inconsistent throughout the school. It gives insufficient guidance to children so does not help them understand the next steps in their learning. A good team of teaching assistants have been trained to make a difference to learning and they are successful in this. They are well managed and help children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress by providing guidance through additional questioning and explanation.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and meets statutory requirements. It is enriched by visits and visitors that have a positive effect on children's learning. For example, the Year 6 history topic on Victorians was supported by a trip to Portland Basin, after which the children wrote lively play scripts. In school, the 'Tameside in Bloom' project has provided good opportunities for children to learn more about the environment and they enjoy growing vegetables on the new school allotment. Special weeks such as Art Week and Anti-Bullying Week provide a good focus for specific learning activities that the children really enjoy. Recent special work linking music, art and writing has produced some high quality work in Years 1 to 4. However, day-to-day lessons miss many opportunities to make links between other subjects, particularly with English. Spanish is an exciting addition to the curriculum at Holden Clough. The children enjoy learning a new language and are very excited about the forthcoming Spanish night where they will dance, eat and drink in Spanish style! The use of ICT has improved since the last inspection with the installation of interactive whiteboards and a new suite of computers, although some teachers lack the confidence to apply this across the curriculum. The school offers sporting opportunities at lunchtime and after school. It also has an active and successful choir that has sung at various events in the community. However, the number of curricular clubs is lower than in many other similar schools.

In the Foundation Stage, the curriculum is very good. Children have opportunities to learn through play inside and out and the range of activities is impressive. Planning through themes is effective because it helps children make links between different areas of learning. For example,

'In the Town' has recently included map making, model making, road safety, a visit from the local vet and writing in the clinic appointment book.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides good quality care, guidance and support. The staff are highly committed to ensuring that the children are well looked after. Systems for ensuring children's welfare are efficient and effective. Arrangements for safeguarding are robust. Children at risk are identified speedily and correct procedures followed. Support for vulnerable children is good and helps them make good progress. However, strategies to support specific groups such as gifted and talented children and those with specific behavioural difficulties are not fully in place. Partnerships with outside organisations are used to broaden children's understanding of health and safety. For example, the local fire service and road safety officers have been into school to demonstrate and talk in assemblies. The school works well with parents and questionnaires showed overwhelmingly that they feel their children are well cared for.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher has a good understanding of where the school needs to improve. She has the skills and experience to help staff focus on priorities in order to make changes that will impact on the children. Staff have been given more responsibility to take the lead in different areas and this is slowly starting to make a difference. The senior leadership team have done much work on improving the tracking of children's progress. In the Foundation Stage this is particularly clear and this helps staff to provide appropriate challenge for different ability groups. The subject leader for English has carried out much work with other staff to change the way writing is taught throughout the school. This has resulted in higher standards and improved progress throughout the school. Other positive changes have included the impact of teaching assistants on learning, improvements to ICT and the accommodation for indoor and outdoor provision in the Foundation Stage. Monitoring of teaching and learning is accurate, although the pace of change is too slow where weaker areas are identified. Standards at Key Stage 1 have been falling, although this has now been halted. Higher ability children are underachieving and in some classrooms the teaching is not good enough to enable children to reach their full potential. Leadership of subject areas was an issue at the last inspection. Much has been done to develop this role for teaching staff, but there is still a way to go. For example, there are too many individual systems for checking progress in curriculum areas. Governors are very supportive of the school and are actively involved, although they do not all feel confident to raise questions about the weaker areas of the school's performance. This means that they are not as influential as they might be in helping the school to improve.

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Annex A

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?	3
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	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	1
The attendance of learners	2
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?	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?	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.

Annex A

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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you very much for making our inspection team so welcome recently. We enjoyed our two days with you because you were all so helpful and kind. We agree with the staff that Holden Clough gives you a satisfactory education. This means that some things about the school are good, but some things could be better. It is our job to help the school by finding out where it needs to improve so that you can all get the very best education. Here are some of the things that are already good.

- The school is one big happy family and there is a warm and welcoming atmosphere. The adults take extremely good care of you.
- Your behaviour is excellent. You also have very good attitudes to learning and are keen to work hard.
- Those of you who need extra help with your learning make good progress.
- You have a good understanding of each other's cultures and religions. You play and work happily together without bullying or racism.
- You know a lot about how to be safe and healthy which helps you make the right choices.
- The fun activities in the Foundation Stage Unit help the children make good progress.

In the past, some year groups have not been making the best progress that they could, especially in Years 1 and 2. Some of you told us that the work you do in school is too easy and we agree. If you could make faster progress you would reach higher levels in your tests at the end of Year 6. Your teachers are starting to make changes so that you can achieve more. All the new work you have been doing on writing this year is splendid! We have asked Mrs McGowan and all the teachers to plan your work differently so that not everybody always does the same work. This will help you reach even higher standards - we believe that you are clever enough to do this! The other thing we would like your teachers to do is mark your work in ways that will give you more tips on how to improve.

You are such a happy team at Holden Clough and we know that you are all eager to do your best. We hope that our report will help you focus on the right things. I wish you every success.

Best wishes to you all.