



Victoria Road Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 110992
Local Authority Halton
Inspection number 288820
Inspection dates 29–30 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	Victoria Road
School category	Community		Runcorn
Age range of pupils	5–11		Cheshire WA7 5BN
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01928 574644
Number on roll (school)	248	Fax number	01928 563294
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr E Owen
		Headteacher	Mrs K Dutton
Date of previous school inspection	10 June 2002		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The pupils who attend this average sized school reside in an area of relative social and economic disadvantage. A lower proportion than average is from a minority ethnic background or use English as an additional language. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The school has a Healthy Schools Award. The headteacher was appointed in September 2005.

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 provides its pupils with a satisfactory standard of education. It has several good features and provides satisfactory value for money. The school knows its strengths and weaknesses but its evaluation of its own effectiveness reflects a view that recent improvements to its provision have moved it from being satisfactory to good. In fact, that improvement has resulted in eliminating areas of inadequacy so that it is now satisfactory.

The school's ethos is very good, a judgement endorsed by pupils, governors and parents, all of whom praise the school's very caring and supportive atmosphere. Pupils' behaviour is excellent and they have positive attitudes to lessons and to the good range of out-of-class activities the school provides. Their contribution to the school community is considerable. They assume responsibilities confidently and willingly, promoting very good relationships by acting as play leaders and by mediating where minor conflicts occur between pupils. Their insistence on eating healthily, influencing, for example, beneficial changes to the school lunches, and on exercising regularly, means that they follow a healthy lifestyle.

Pupils are very well cared for and enjoy school. Those who are more vulnerable, including pupils who find learning difficult, are very well supported to achieve as well as others. Because of effective teaching and a well planned curriculum in the Foundation Stage children make a good start to their education in the Reception class and achieve well. Elsewhere in the school, pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall. In 2005 and 2006, data indicates some underachievement in Years 1 and 2, initially among the more able pupils and in 2006, in writing for all pupils. The recently appointed headteacher has acted swiftly and with some success to improve the quality of teaching and the curriculum for these two year groups. However, pupils' achievements in writing are still not high enough. Effective leadership has also resulted in improvements in standards in Years 3 to 6. The school's 2006 Year 6 national test results indicate improvements on previous years. Despite the good leadership of the new headteacher, the quality of leadership and management is satisfactory overall. Other leaders and managers and improvement plans are insufficiently focused on the specific improvements pupils need to make to raise their achievement. Likewise, the new systems to check on pupils' progress are not yet used effectively in some classes to match exactly the work set in lessons to pupils' needs. Good innovations have been introduced this term which are beginning to improve the quality of writing, particularly that of boys. The school has successfully addressed the issues identified in the last inspection report and has made satisfactory improvement since then. Recent improvements and the good leadership of the headteacher place the school in a satisfactory position to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement in Years 1 and 2, especially in writing and for the more able.
- Ensure that the overall quality of teaching improves from satisfactory to good.

- Improve the use of information available from checks on pupils' progress to ensure that work set in lessons fully matches pupils' needs.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are broadly average by the end of Year 6 and pupils make satisfactory progress from the time they enter the Foundation Stage with broadly expected skills, to the end of Year 6. Good provision in the Foundation Stage helps children to get off to a good start to their education. Recent test results at the end of Year 2 indicate that there has been some underachievement by pupils in this year group, most noticeable among the more able and in writing. Effective strategies recently implemented by the school have eliminated much of this underachievement. However, standards in writing are still not high enough. Pupils' work and school data show that pupils' achievement is beginning to better reflect the standards of which they are capable. In 2006, test results at the end of Year 6 improved in English, mathematics and science to reach broadly average standards. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those whose first language is not English make satisfactory progress because they are set work that meets their needs and are supported appropriately.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils are confident and polite, enjoy school and attend well. Their excellent behaviour contributes very well to the school's warm ethos and to the high quality relationships. Pupils know what constitutes a healthy lifestyle and practise this very well through sport and physical activities, in lessons, after school and at break times where the school has provided a good range of activities. Pupils know that a balanced diet contributes to their good health. They have influenced school lunch menus to reflect this knowledge.

Pupils feel safe in school and they are positive that bullying is rare. The school council is a good example of pupils making a positive difference to the decisions taken in school. They take their responsibilities seriously and have a voice in the school. Pupils are proud of the 'playleader' and 'buddy' systems. A current project carried out by pupils in Year 5 is developing their research skills. These three initiatives provide a firm foundation for their future economic welfare.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. In the Foundation Stage teaching and support is of good quality; this ensures that children progress well. Teaching and learning are weaker in Years 1 and 2. Teaching is not challenging enough for more able pupils and staff do not consistently set work that meets all pupils' needs well. This has resulted in some underachievement in these year groups. There are now signs of improvement because of the strong actions taken by the headteacher to improve the quality of teaching.

In Years 3 to 6 the quality of teaching ranges between good and satisfactory. The consistently good relationships between staff and pupils ensure that lessons are calm and positive. In the best lessons pupils work collaboratively and independently, which enhances their learning well. In less successful lessons, pupils are not always clear about what to do and how to do it. This is because teachers' explanations are not explicit enough, nor does the work teachers set sufficiently match their needs. Teaching assistants provide valuable support, especially for the more vulnerable pupils, often enabling them to participate fully in lessons and to better understand facts or concepts being taught.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

In the Foundation Stage the curriculum is of good quality. Adults work well as a team to provide children with a wide variety of stimulating activities both in the classroom and in the very well equipped and attractively designed outside area. In Years 1 to 6 many of the approaches to improve the curriculum are in the early stages of development and their full impact on raising standards has yet to be felt. Pupils are in no doubt that the recent changes to how and what they are taught is increasing their enjoyment of school. The school has recognised that there has been a need to improve achievement in Years 1 and 2 and has implemented a new approach to teaching writing. This is beginning to have a positive effect on improving pupils' literacy skills and to address the underachievement in this area. However, the curriculum in Years 1 and 2 remains a relative weakness. For example, in mathematics there is too little emphasis on pupils working on practical and relevant activities. Older pupils now engage in activities that help them to understand how learning in different subjects is linked together. This was well illustrated by Year 5 and Year 6 pupils in their work on the history of World War 2 where they made good use of literacy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Effective use of ICT across the curriculum adds to the enjoyment of lessons. Pupils also take part in a wide range of extra-curricular activities such as sports, drama and music, which add to their learning and enjoyment.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils are very well cared for and supported. Procedures to safeguard them and to ensure their good health are in place and meet requirements. Parents, governors and pupils all confirm that the school is a safe place in which to learn and play. The fact that pupils feel so secure contributes well to their enjoyment of school and to their willingness to join in so many activities. As a result of the effective systems to ensure pupils' excellent behaviour and their good attendance and punctuality, these aspects are strengths in their personal development. Recently improved procedures to check on pupils' progress, so that teachers can set more appropriate work in lessons, are not yet fully effective. There is well targeted support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities for those whose first language is not English.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher's good leadership is a key factor in the improvements made by the school in the short time since her appointment. Crucial changes in arrangements in Years 1 and 2 have resulted in much needed improvements in pupils' standards and achievements, especially for the more able and in writing. Even so, more needs to be done to raise standards, achievement and the overall quality of teaching in Years 1 and 2. The headteacher provides a clear drive for school improvement, to which most other leaders and managers are responding positively. Many of the strategies put in place to raise standards and achievement are in their infancy and just beginning to show results. However, plans for improvement are insufficiently focused on exactly what pupils need to do to raise their achievement to a consistently good level.

The school has good partnerships with other schools, colleges and external providers to ensure pupils' good skills in ICT, sport and the arts. Governance is satisfactory. Governors diligently carry out their required duties and support the school's work strongly. However, they are not fully effective in holding the school to account for any weaknesses, for instance the recent unsatisfactory aspects of provision in Years 1 and 2.

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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?	3
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	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.

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	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	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for making us welcome during the days we spent in your school. Your school is currently providing you with a satisfactory education, but there are good things that we would like to list for you:

- your behaviour is excellent and your very cheerful and polite welcome for visitors greatly impressed us
- your teachers and the other adults who work with you in lessons or look after you during play and lunchtimes care for you well and help you get over any upsets quickly
- we agree with you that some of the changes made to what and how you are taught mean that you enjoy lessons more than you used to
- children in the Reception class do well
- your new headteacher has already introduced lots of things that are helping you do better in your work and to enjoy school more
- the school has good links with the community and other schools and colleges which provide you with some really interesting information and things to do.

These are the next steps for the school to take to help you do even better:

- to make sure that those of you in Years 1 and 2, particularly those of you who find work easier than others, to do even better, especially in your writing
- to make sure that all of your lessons are good ones
- for teachers to use what they know about how you are getting on in lessons to always set you work that helps you improve.

Thank you for helping us with the inspection. We hope that you continue to really enjoy school.