



Sound and District Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 111074
Local Authority Cheshire
Inspection number 288848
Inspection dates 17–18 January 2007
Reporting inspector Graham Martin

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Whitchurch Road
School category	Community		Sound, Nantwich
Age range of pupils	4–11		Cheshire CW5 8AE
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01270 780270
Number on roll (school)	115	Fax number	01270 780020
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr David Lowe
		Headteacher	Mrs L Williams
Date of previous school inspection	15 October 2001		

Age group 4–11	Inspection dates 17–18 January 2007	Inspection number 288848
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average school. It serves a wide rural area of small villages and hamlets. Nearly half of its pupils travel from outside its immediate catchment area. All pupils are of White British heritage. A few pupils are admitted from traveller families. The number eligible for free school meals is below average while the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. The school is part of the Nantwich Network for Learning, to share good teaching and learning practice in literacy and numeracy. It is part of a cluster of schools that provides an enhanced curriculum for pupils with particular gifts or talents. In 2006, the school was awarded the National Healthy Schools standard. A high level of staff turnover affected stability in 2005/2006. Before and after school care, managed by the school's governors, was inspected separately in October 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

As soon as you step inside this good school you feel welcome. Its strong family ethos, recognised and valued by pupils and parents alike, is a noticeable strength. As a result, pupils enjoy positive relationships with each other and the adults who help them. Their learning is enhanced by the good attitudes that result from this, supported well by good teaching and activities that engage their interest. All of this leads to good standards, both in academic subjects and in the pupils' personal and social development. Parents truly value how well their children are prepared to move on to high school, one saying that even if their family had to move away from the area, they would still like their child to attend a school as caring as Sound. The headteacher leads and manages the school well, with a particular strength in helping new staff to settle quickly, enabling continuity in pupils' learning. Overall, the inspection agrees with her assessment of the school's work, although the school has improved its effectiveness since some of the evaluations were rather cautious. Pupils' good personal development is testament to the quality of care for them as individuals, with every child valued for what he or she can contribute to the life of the school. The extensive range of learning opportunities provided adds good value to every child's learning. This was recognised by a parent who said, 'every child gets a chance to shine because their interests are recognised and nurtured'.

Because of the interesting learning activities provided and the care shown for them, pupils greatly enjoy school. They respond well to opportunities to develop their independence and their awareness of others. As a result, they behave well, act safely and respect their environment. They know how to live healthy lifestyles, as their interest in sport and their knowledge of how food affects their bodies testifies. Jogging the 'Golden Mile' once a week has become an enjoyable 'must do' activity for almost every pupil! Pupils have a genuine care and concern for the needs of other children, teaching them to play games considerately and helping each other to be better learners when work is challenging. The school has strengthened procedures for appointing staff so that national guidelines for safeguarding children are met.

This school provides good value for money. The headteacher's good leadership, with able support from governors, has successfully guided the school through a period of recent change. The school has sustained its effectiveness through these changes, and the headteacher knows what needs to be done to improve teaching and learning so that it is consistently as good as the best. The inspection agrees with this evaluation, finding that higher ability pupils are not achieving as well in mathematics as they are in English. Not all teachers use marking and assessment consistently well to help pupils meet their writing targets. The school is well placed to improve further, having started to take the steps needed to share good practice in assessment and to thereby improve learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that higher ability pupils achieve as well in mathematics as they do in English.

- Improve the consistency of marking and assessment so that pupils of all ages know how to achieve their learning targets in writing.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children begin the Foundation Stage with broadly expected skills, having come from many different pre-school settings across this rural community. A good start in the Reception class ensures that all children progress well, enabling the majority to reach the expected goals. By the end of Year 2, standards have been sustained at levels above average for several years, with an improvement in the number of pupils attaining the higher levels in writing. This good achievement is maintained by pupils in Years 3 to 6, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. By Year 6, standards are above average, with a particular strength in pupils' reading skills and in their steadily improving standards in writing. The proportion of higher ability pupils attaining the higher Level 5 in mathematics is lower than in English. While the small size of its cohorts skews overall percentages, the school needs to do more to help more pupils cross the Level 4/5 threshold in mathematics to close this gap.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

This school's strong family ethos is reflected abundantly in pupils' personal development and well-being. The good relationships in the school are evident in the way that pupils respect and understand the feelings of others. Pupils attend school well and they are extremely polite, friendly and courteous. By Year 6, pupils are confident and eager learners who take pride in their achievements. Pupils agree that their school provides them with the skills and self-belief to be good learners, as seen in the mature outlook of a Year 6 pupil who commented, 'I am looking forward to high school because this school has got me ready for it'. Overwhelmingly, parents value the school's effective work in promoting their children's personal development. The school council leads decision making actively; its pupil members set a good example for other pupils, cooperate with adults and understand well their responsibilities as young citizens. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They value the school's work to help them understand the need for rules and good order, to appreciate healthy living and they learn how to keep safe by minimising risks to themselves and others.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Good teaching and learning is reflected in the pupils' enjoyment of lessons. They learn avidly because teachers plan activities that are fun and engage the pupils well. Teachers use a good range of practical activities, games and interactive whiteboards to stimulate

pupils' interest in lessons. Pupils enjoy their involvement in question and answer sessions that promote their independent thinking skills. Lessons are managed well and resources are used to good effect to enhance learning. The use of assessment, however, is not equally good across the school. This is largely because a number of recently appointed teachers are still agreeing a common system of assessment to improve learning. Consequently, pupils with the ability to reach higher levels of attainment in mathematics are not always set challenging enough work. In addition, teachers' marking does not always give pupils good enough guidance to help them to meet their learning targets in writing.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum has been improved by providing better opportunities for pupils to use their information and communication technology (ICT) skills in other subjects. This school has a good curriculum that meets pupils' learning needs, with clear links made across subjects, successfully promoting enjoyment of learning and good achievement. Provision for vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. The health, safety and emotional development of learners is well supported through sport, exercise and the use of visitors to enrich opportunities for the arts. Good community partnerships increase opportunities for pupils, including sports competitions, arts events and opportunities for pupils to meet and make friendships with children in the wider locality. The very successful introduction of French for Years 1 to 6 has been welcomed by parents and pupils alike. On transfer to high school, a pupil was mistakenly thought to have lived in France for a while because their command of the language was so good!

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

'I don't think there could be a more caring school than this', said one parent. Certainly, for the quality of personal, social and emotional care this school gives its pupils, it could not be faulted. Pupils feel safe, secure and confident. Procedures for child protection, for safeguarding pupils and for assessing risks are in place. Because every pupil is well known to staff, each is treated as an individual and with dignity, at the same time learning that they all have a responsibility of care to each other. 'Our school is the hub of our community', said the chair of governors, and this sentiment, repeated often by parents, is reflected in every aspect of the work of the school. However, changes to staffing such as those recently experienced here bring fresh challenges. Therefore, while the school has made a good start in involving pupils in their learning by setting writing targets, there is more to be done to ensure that some of the good practice seen in assessment is shared across the school to make it consistently effective.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher's commitment to the well-being of Sound school and its pupils is undeniably strong. The school is well led and managed, setting a positive model of care for children and standard of professionalism for other staff that is valued greatly by parents. One commented that the 'headteacher always makes sure that things get sorted out.' Checks on the school's work are diligent and thorough, enabling the school to identify what needs to be done for further improvement, such as involving the school in a local learning network to help with the drive to raise standards. Recent changes in staff and the lack of a permanent deputy headteacher mean that the school has experienced some turbulence. However, the headteacher, with good support from governors, has managed this change effectively. By sustaining a good ethos, sharing expertise and good practice well, the headteacher has accelerated improvement once again, using the good skills of both experienced and recently appointed staff.

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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	2
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	2
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	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	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	2
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	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

I felt very welcomed when I recently spent two days inspecting the work of Sound Primary School. I enjoyed my visit very much. Thank you for all the conversations we had that helped me to find out how well your school works. You told me that you think you have a good school and I agree with you.

You told me about how happy you are at school and how well you feel looked after. Again, I agree with your opinion, you do have a school where you are all cared for equally well. At Sound Primary School you learn the importance of being part of a community that works together to achieve success. Part of that success is the good standards that you reach in your work.

To make sure this success carries on and your school keeps getting better, I have asked your teachers to do two things:

- give you the right sort of challenges so that you can do your best in mathematics
- give you better advice that will help you to meet the targets you have to improve your writing.

I know that your headteacher, who works very hard and is popular with you and your families, will give your teachers the right help to achieve this. You can help as well by continuing to enjoy learning as much as you do.