

Westminster Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111086
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	288852
Inspection dates	15–16 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Mark Madeley

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	124
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr D Harding
Headteacher	Mrs Sue Finch
Date of previous school inspection	28 January 2002
School address	John Street Ellesmere Port Cheshire CH65 2ED
Telephone number	0151 3551524
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This school is much smaller than average and its numbers have declined since its inspection in 2002. The children are mostly of White British heritage, though a growing group of children - currently 8% - come from Eastern Europe and speak English as an additional language. The school serves the immediate area of mainly rented terraced housing and high-rise flats. Approximately half the children are eligible for free school meals. More than 50% of children have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and 7% of them have a statement of special educational need. Both these proportions are considerably higher than the national average. After a two-year period of leadership by a temporary headteacher, a permanent headteacher was appointed in September 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

Inspection findings do not support the school's view that it provides a satisfactory education for all its children. In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing less well than in all circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to children's standards in English, mathematics and science, the quality of the information and communication technology (ICT), curriculum and teaching. The school gives inadequate value for money.

Despite recent positive action, improvement since the last inspection has been inadequate. Children's results in national tests have declined: in 2006 their results in English, mathematics and science were very low. The absence of teachers has not been managed well so children have large gaps in their learning and their behaviour has deteriorated. The new headteacher has moved quickly to improve the situation. Management now has a clear picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses because recently introduced checking systems are accurate. The school's leadership now knows the school well, although in its self-evaluation it has over estimated the impact of recent initiatives to improve children's achievement and teaching. Future planning highlights the right things to improve and is starting to have an impact on children's learning. Because strong teamwork is being established, with senior managers and governors fully involved in the improvement process, the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve further.

Teaching is not consistently good enough to eradicate the gaps children have in their knowledge and understanding. It is, however, improving and children currently make adequate progress in some classes. The curriculum is inadequate because, until very recently, the school did not have the equipment to teach the required programme for ICT. Children have gaps in their learning and weak ICT skills and so are inadequately prepared for secondary education. Their personal development is satisfactory. For example, most children enjoy school and behave well. The school council tells management what the children think could be improved and children, on their own initiative, raise funds for good causes. Children are well cared for. All staff, and particularly the learning mentors, show children how to stay safe and live healthily.

The provision and standards in the Foundation Stage are good. This aspect of the school's work is a strength. It gives children a really good start to their school lives because there are high expectations of what children can achieve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve children's standards in English, mathematics and science, particularly in Key Stage 2.
- Improve the impact of teaching on children's learning to ensure that all groups of children make adequate progress.
- Ensure that children experience the full curriculum for ICT and have opportunities to consolidate and develop their skills in other subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Most children in Years 1 to 6 do not achieve well and standards are very low in most classes. The situation is improving: a little over half of the children are now making adequate progress, but inconsistencies in progress between classes remain. Older children have significant gaps in their knowledge and understanding from the recent past because of staffing difficulties and the poor behaviour of a few hindered their learning. This led to the test results in English, mathematics and science at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2006 to be very low. They have been declining over the last three years. The school failed to reach its targets in 2006 by a very long way. Test results in Key Stage 1 have been significantly below average for four of the last five years.

Children in Foundation Stage make good progress from their low starting points on entry. Many have poorly developed language skills and find it difficult to work together when playing and learning. They quickly settle into the well established routines because there are good links with the on-site Nursery. They respond positively to the high expectations of the class teacher and join Year 1 as confident learners.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Children's personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is satisfactory. Most children enjoy coming to school and behave well in class and outside in the playground. A small group of children do not like school and find it difficult to behave well. Others do not attend regularly. The school works effectively with these groups of children to encourage them back into school and to learn self-control. Overall attendance is satisfactory. Children feel safe from oppressive behaviour. They say that, though some children occasionally 'kick off', they do not feel endangered and rarely now is their work interrupted. Children know about staying healthy and like to play with the games equipment at lunchtime. They know which foods are good for them but find it hard to resist the temptation of fatty foods, for example one child said, 'I have chips every night.'

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

The quality of teaching and learning is inadequate. Although regular reviews and support are improving the teaching, it is not consistently good enough to close the gaps in children's knowledge and understanding. Most children want to learn and respond positively to staff and their consistent approach to managing behaviour. However, assessment information has not been used effectively to identify children who need additional support or greater challenge. For example, until recently few children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities had been identified and their specific needs had not been met. There remain inconsistencies in the way teachers match tasks to children's abilities: for example, too often the most and least able do the same mathematical tasks. The quality of marking is also too variable, so not all children know how to improve their work.

The quality of teaching in the Foundation Stage is good. Children enjoy their learning because activities interest them, they are consistently challenged to do their best and praise is used very effectively to raise their self-esteem.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 4

The curriculum is inadequate because it does not fully meet the needs of the children. They leave school with weak basic skills and gaps in their learning. The practical elements of mathematics and science have not been covered in sufficient depth to help them develop enquiring minds. Children do not have all the computer skills they should because the school did not have the equipment to teach thoroughly all the topics in the ICT programme. This has improved recently because the school has purchased the necessary equipment. Children like the regular visits they go on. They learn to behave outside school and broaden their experience of life beyond their area. The older children especially enjoy the residential visits, where they experience activities like canoeing and hill-walking. This helps them mature and become more independent.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory, rather than the school's view that they are good, because systems to help children improve their work are not consistently effective. Also, many children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have only recently had adequate support for their needs. Most children have a sound idea of how to improve their work but teachers' marking lacks consistency. Children have individual learning targets for English and mathematics and teachers have explained them. However, because the system is very new, children are sometimes unsure which target they are working towards and so at this stage the system is not helpful enough to some of them. The parents rightly feel that their children are well cared for and kept safe. Staff are very effective in meeting the many and varied pastoral needs of the children and their families. By offering children a free breakfast club, attendance and punctuality have been improved. Procedures for safeguarding children are secure. Learning mentors are very effective in helping children address their feelings through skilled counselling.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Governors, staff, parents and children praise the work of the new headteacher. Parents say that, 'the school has improved dramatically' since her arrival and evidence from the inspection supports this view. Staff and governors work as a team for the benefit of the children. They have been brought together by effective leadership, which shares information and involves colleagues in making decisions. Systems to check children's progress have been established. They provide a clear picture of children's underachievement over time but also highlight recent improvements. The quality of teaching and learning is now reviewed regularly and support has been organised where necessary. The judgements in monitoring reports concur with those of the inspection. The school's future planning is firmly based on a good understanding of where the school is now and where management wants to take it. Management knows that there is a legacy of underachievement, which needs to be eradicated quickly. It receives support from the local authority's agencies

on many fronts and there are growing signs of success. Governance is inadequate. The governing body has failed to hold the school to account for declining standards. It has, however, maintained a close watch over spending, which has ensured that a budget deficit has not increased. It is now working effectively with the new headteacher and starting to come to terms with its full responsibilities.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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?	4
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	No

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	4
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	4
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4
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?	Yes

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

I was very pleased with the welcome I received when I visited your school recently. Thank you for speaking with me because your views are important. You said that you liked your new headteacher and the positive changes she has made to your school. I agree with this view but think that she has not yet had time to improve the school enough to give you an acceptable level of education. Many of you have large gaps in your learning because teachers were absent and the behaviour of a few got out of hand. I think that not enough is being done to close those gaps and help you get ready for secondary school. For this reason I have given your school a Notice to Improve.

I have asked your headteacher to do the following three things to make your school a better place in which to learn.

- Improve your standards in English, mathematics and science.
- Ensure that teachers help you all to make enough progress.
- Improve the ICT curriculum.

You can play your part in improving your school by working hard at all times, being on your best behaviour both inside and outside of school and attending regularly so that you make the most of your education.

Some of the good things about your school are:

- the Reception class gives you a good start to your education
- most of you attend regularly and behave well
- the breakfast club gives you a good start to the day
- the school takes you on many visits.

Your school is heading in the right direction so and I wish you well for the future.