



Beechwood School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 111211
Local Authority Cheshire
Inspection number 288893
Inspection dates 27–28 November 2006
Reporting inspector Brian Padgett HMI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Meredith Street
School category	Community		Crewe
Age range of pupils	3–11		Cheshire CW1 2PH
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01270 214490
Number on roll (school)	295	Fax number	01270 251529
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Gwyn Evans
		Headteacher	Mr Anthony Hadfield
Date of previous school inspection	4 February 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
3–11	27–28 November 2006	288893

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

This is a larger than average primary school situated near to the centre of Crewe. It serves a community that has high levels of social and economic disadvantage, amongst the highest in Cheshire. The rate at which children enter or leave the school during term-time is high, reflecting the unsettled lives of some of the families. The school has a Speech and Language Unit with places for 15 children from the local area. Most of the children in the school are White British. Since the last inspection the proportion of children from minority ethnic groups has increased, including Travellers and children from Poland and the former Czech Republic. Some of the newcomers have English as an additional language. About a third of children have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school is a member of the Excellence in Crewe Partnership (EiCP).

The new headteacher took up his post in September 2006.

The school has gained several awards in recent years including the Inclusion Quality Mark, the Artsmark Gold Award, the Basic Skills Award and the Healthy Schools Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school where children achieve well. Compared to most children, many at Beechwood have to overcome significant barriers to learning, including having social, emotional or learning difficulties, or not speaking English well. With the good care and education provided by the school, children overcome these barriers. Children's personal development is good. They become mature and responsible during their time at the school and their behaviour is good. Standards in the key subjects of English and mathematics do not reach average levels but children make good progress from very low starting points. In the most recent national tests, in summer 2006, Year 6 children reached the highest levels yet attained by the school in English: the result of a concerted effort to improve writing.

The school makes good use of support from outside to overcome the difficulties that children face. Most notably, it has strong links with the local EiCP. The school is closely involved with the EiCP in many projects to raise standards. For example, it funds a learning mentor who has made a very positive impact on improving attendance. It also helps fund the nurture group, 'The Honey Pot', where the most vulnerable children acquire the skills and attitudes they need to succeed in the classroom. Parents are very supportive of the school. They know their children are settled and happy, although a significant minority believes the school should do more to involve them. Inspectors agree with this view.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Children enjoy lessons. Teaching is most effective in the Nursery, in the Speech and Language Unit and in Key Stage 2. It is satisfactory in Reception and in Key Stage 1. School leaders have identified Reception and Key Stage 1 (Years 1 and 2) as a focus for improvement and the inspection confirms this view.

There have been several changes and disruptions to the school since the last inspection, including two changes of headteacher. Throughout the changes, the ethos and values of the school have remained the same and the commitment of the staff to the children has not faltered. The staff have successfully taken on the issues for children raised by the Every Child Matters agenda. All of the outcomes for children: that they stay safe, be healthy, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and secure their future economic well-being are demonstrated successfully, although academic standards would need to be raised further to meet the last outcome well. With the appointment of a new headteacher, the school is about to embark on further changes, including the creation of a new senior leadership team. There is good morale amongst staff and an appetite for change, so the school's capacity for further improvement is good. At present, improvement plans are not sufficiently focused on raising standards, but this does not detract significantly from the strengths of leadership and management, which are good overall.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in Reception and Key Stage 1.

- Focus development plans more on raising standards, providing clear lines of accountability and evaluating performance more sharply through its impact on children's achievement and standards.
- Involve parents more as partners in their children's education.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Most children spend a year, part-time, in the Nursery before joining Reception. Others enter from a range of pre-school settings or from none. The common characteristic is that their levels of attainment on entry to school are low. Children make good progress in the Nursery, but children enter Reception with levels of attainment and understanding well below those of most children of their age.

Once in the main school, children make satisfactory progress in the Reception classes and satisfactory progress in the Key Stage 1 classes. However, this is insufficient progress to lift the standards children attain to national expectations by the end of the Foundation Stage or to average levels by the end of Key Stage 1. Children leave Year 2 working at levels significantly below average. This has been a consistent pattern for several years.

Once in Key Stage 2 (Years 3 to 6), pupils make good progress. Standards of work observed during the inspection within Key Stage 2 were broadly average with a good proportion of work above average. Work in art is of a high standard. However, the national test results at Year 6 are generally below average. Several factors account for this apparent disparity.

- The rate at which children join or leave the school during term-time is double that experienced in most schools. Generally, the children who leave the school mid-term are those in line to do well in the national tests: those who join are less likely to do well because many of them have learning difficulties.
- The children in the Speech and Language Unit are counted in the results. All these children have statements of special educational need and most are not in line to attain the national average, in English in particular.
- The school admits a number of children from Eastern Europe who arrive part way through their primary education unable to speak English. Understandably, such children are less likely to reach the national expectations because of their lack of understanding of the English language.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development of children, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They make very good progress in their personal development. There is a very marked contrast between the levels of maturity, confidence and independence of the youngest children and the oldest ones. Older children are polite and self-confident young persons who look after younger children

well and who work together harmoniously. Behaviour on the whole is good. Children of different cultures get on well together. Attendance is below average, but the school makes every effort through its learning mentor to cut down on unauthorised absence.

Children feel safe at school. They choose healthy options at lunchtime and younger children eat fruit during break. A thriving breakfast club ensures that children who attend get a nutritious start to the day. Children are active and take advantage of the many opportunities for physical exercise during school time and after school. School councillors are increasingly involved in the decisions about school life and older children, in particular, willingly take on posts of responsibility around the school, for instance, as prefects, playground buddies and librarians. They learn that privileges are earned and can be lost through inappropriate behaviour. In many ways, not least through their good attitudes to learning, children are preparing for the world of work. However, the standards of many children in the core skills of literacy and numeracy remain below the level they will need to be sure of success at secondary school and beyond, and constant effort is required to lift standards.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Typically, teaching and learning in the Nursery, the Speech and Language Unit and in Key Stage 2 is of good quality. Children are keen to learn. Lessons and activities have clear objectives and work is interesting and well organised for children of different abilities. Teachers have high expectations of children's presentation and children work to their targets, which they keep beside them for reference. In the Nursery staff provide experiences of good quality that cover all areas of learning and staff rigorously track the progress children make. They provide regular opportunities for the children to learn out of doors.

In all classes teachers and teaching assistants enjoy good relationships with children, who show respect and a desire to please their teachers. School is calm and orderly. However, in the Reception and Key Stage 1 classes, although teaching is satisfactory, the quality of the learning environment is not high enough and insufficient thought has been given as to how the classrooms are arranged to support learning. In addition, staff do not make the most of incidental opportunities to promote learning and language development. Teaching in the nurture group, in the Unit and in small groups around the school is effective in helping groups of children who have specific difficulties to make good progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is of good quality. It is broad, balanced and rich. Literacy and numeracy are given an appropriately prominent place in the curriculum and children in Key Stage 2 are taught in ability groups to ensure that work in these areas is finely tuned to their

needs. The strengths noted in the previous inspection, including the meaningful linking of subjects in topics and the quality of art, have been maintained. Other strengths, for example, in music and in dance and drama, are being developed. There is a good range of enrichment activities, including residential experiences, and a range of after-school clubs for the children to enjoy and in which they can develop their skills: some are for children who are gifted or talented. The children in Key Stage 1 have their own after-school clubs. The curriculum in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory, but the Reception children do not have access to the outdoors as a place for learning in the same way as the children in Nursery.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support for pupils are good. This is the single aspect where the school's self-assessment - of outstanding - differs from the inspectors' view. The care for children is outstanding but academic guidance and support are less strong. The staff are fully committed to the well-being of children and arrangements for ensuring their safety and well-being are robust. The care for the most vulnerable children with pressing social and emotional needs is outstanding and the nurture group is a place where this level of care is seen. The school has many strategies to intervene when children fall behind with their work. The staff in the Speech and Language Unit ensure that the children they support are well integrated within the school, having lessons in the Unit where appropriate and joining their peers in the subjects where they can play a full part. Good use is made of specialist staff, teaching assistants and volunteers to meet children's individual learning needs, including helping them learn English where appropriate. Although the school provides opportunities for children to do homework at school, less use is made of opportunities for parents to act as partners in their children's education.

The school tracks the progress of children in the key subjects adequately and implements a number of tests to assess their levels of understanding. It acknowledges that there is some way to go to make this information easier for teachers to use to identify children who are falling behind and to underpin planning to deal with underachievement. The school has plans of good quality to improve the assessment and tracking of pupils' progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The school has maintained good overall performance since the last inspection, rising successfully to face the challenges presented by an increasingly disadvantaged and changing community. Strong leadership and management have played an important part in this success. The school provides good value for money.

The new headteacher has made a good start. He has built on the existing secure foundations of leadership: the school's vision and sense of purpose. He has quickly

gained the confidence of staff, pupils, governors, and partners, such as the EiCP. The school has the support of the majority of parents, but a minority feel that they should be more closely involved in their children's education and that it should respond to their views more. In these respects, inspectors agree. The headteacher and the acting deputy headteacher have accurately identified areas for improvement, and plans for tackling weaknesses and raising standards further have been prepared. At present, although of adequate quality, these plans do not focus sharply enough on raising standards and the impact of actions on standards. Some improvements have already been made, including early action in Reception and Key Stage 1, where there is also an improved start to the day. However, much depends on developing middle management, including subject coordinators. The school is well advanced in creating leadership teams, beginning with the appointment of a deputy headteacher in the very near future. There is good morale in the school and a readiness to embrace change. The capacity for improvement is good.

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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	3
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	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	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?	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

As you know, I visited your school recently with Mrs Drake, Mrs Aspinall and Miss Alam. We came to see how well you are learning. I am writing to you to tell you what we found. We enjoyed our two days at Beechwood. Everyone was polite, welcoming and helpful.

When Mrs Drake talked to representatives of the school council, they said that this is a good school. We think so too. It has many strengths, but the main reasons for it being a good school are that all children, no matter how easy or how hard they find learning, enjoy school and achieve well. In nearly all the lessons we saw, children were keen to learn and tried their best, including the children who are learning English as their second language. We were very impressed by your art work around the school. We noticed how much more responsible you become as you grow older, how you take on responsibilities such as being a prefect, a playground buddy or a librarian, and how the school council is beginning to influence the way the school develops.

We believe you are taught well. We think that you are taught best in the Nursery, the Unit and in the junior classes. We have asked your new headteacher, Mr Hadfield, to work with the teachers to make the teaching in the other classes just as good as the best. This is a good time for the new leaders of the school to take stock and make new plans for the school's future. I'm sure you will contribute your ideas to the plans for development. The school works closely with your parents but we would like it to try even harder to involve them so that they can play a full part in your education.

And what can you do better than what you already do? The most important thing is for you to reach the highest standards you can. You make good progress but many of you do not yet reach the standards in English and mathematics that you need to do well at secondary school. Last year, the children in Year 6 reached the highest standards yet achieved in English at Beechwood. We want you to keep this up and every year set yourself targets to do better still.