



Dodleston CofE Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 111272
Local Authority Cheshire
Inspection number 288910
Inspection dates 18–19 October 2006
Reporting inspector Frank Ravey

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Church Road
School category	Voluntary controlled		Dodleston, Chester
Age range of pupils	4–11		Cheshire CH4 9NG
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01244 660369
Number on roll (school)	50	Fax number	01244 661450
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr C James
		Headteacher	Mrs H Bushnell
Date of previous school inspection	10 March 2003		

Age group 4–11	Inspection dates 18–19 October 2006	Inspection number 288910
--------------------------	---	------------------------------------

© Crown copyright 2006

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This very small school serves a village community about four miles outside Chester. Nearly all its pupils are White British and none is learning English as an additional language. Fewer pupils than average are eligible for free school meals and the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is presently below average although this varies from year to year. The number on roll is falling, reflecting population changes in the local area. In the past two years, the school has suffered significant disruptions to staffing. Of the teaching and teaching support staff, 50% were new to the school at the start of the autumn term 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school that achieves particular success with pupils' personal development. The headteacher and governing body have steered the school successfully through a period of considerable difficulties with staffing which resulted in some pupils underachieving in 2005. Things have improved since then. Now the achievement of all groups of pupils is satisfactory. They make satisfactory progress throughout the school to reach average standards by the end of Year 6. The reason for this improvement is that the school has recognised its difficulties and has faced up to them. The governing body, with several new members, has taken the lead along with the headteacher in making changes to staffing and in devising a sound, well focused plan for improvement. The school's caring ethos and its 'family feel' mean that a good foundation for improvement already existed. To this has been added an accurate analysis of what needs to be done to improve. There is a feeling of optimism about the school - one shared by staff, parents and governors. This was summed up neatly by one governor who said, 'There's such a buzz, a sense of hopefulness, about the school.'

However, although a good start has been made, much remains to be done - a fact recognised by the school. New staff are settling in well with classes. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, and teaching is sometimes good, but it does not consistently provide the challenge pupils need to boost their progress from satisfactory to good and hence lead them to higher standards. In science at Key Stage 2, pupils show reasonable knowledge and understanding but they are not given sufficient opportunities to engage in practical investigations. This limits their achievement and holds down standards, especially for higher-attaining pupils.

Personal development and well-being are good. Pupils respond well to the good care they receive. As a result they behave well and enjoy school. They are keen to learn and show a good understanding of why it is important to develop a healthy lifestyle and how to do this. A strong feature of their personal development lies in the good contributions they make to helping others in school, in the local community and in the wider world. Their actions show how much this small school is at the heart of its village community. Staff know pupils well and provide good personal support for them but academic support is not yet strong enough. Whilst pupils have some learning targets these are not yet focused on raising individual pupils' sights as to what they can achieve and how to do so.

The school curriculum is satisfactory. It has some undoubted strengths in the good quality of activities provided beyond usual requirements, for example in the teaching of French and the good range of after-school clubs, which are very popular with pupils. Provision in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory, helping young children to make satisfactory progress in acquiring the full range of learning skills. However, planning is not always sharp enough to provide these children with the richness of learning experience that will transform their satisfactory progress to good.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. With half the teaching staff very new to the school, the development of the skills of subject leaders is in its early stages. However, the headteacher is monitoring the work of the school closely and this, together with her partnership with the governing body, is driving forward improvement. Standards are rising and pupils' progress is secure across the school. The governing body is purposeful and well organised. The good teaching required to boost pupils' progress is clearly evident in some lessons and forms a solid base on which to build. Staff morale is high. A good plan for improvement is in place. All this indicates that the school has satisfactory capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide greater challenge in lessons for all groups of pupils in order to speed up their progress and raise standards
- Provide pupils with sufficient opportunities to engage in scientific investigations to raise standards in science, particularly for higher-attaining pupils
- Work with pupils to set individual learning targets that will show pupils the standards to which they should aspire and make clear the steps they must take to achieve these
- Improve planning for the Foundation Stage so that pupils consistently receive the learning experiences that will help them make good rather than satisfactory progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The concept of 'average' is of very limited value with such small numbers of children starting in the Reception class. The standards they bring with them vary greatly from year to year but overall are broadly average. Pupils make satisfactory progress across each key stage and mostly leave the school with average standards. 2005 was an exception. Standards fell that year and the Year 6 cohort did not make sufficient progress, but now pupils are back on track. Achievement is now satisfactory overall for all groups of pupils, although in science pupils – and higher attainers in particular – do not achieve as well as they should because they do not have sufficient opportunity to develop the skills of practical investigation. Pupils' progress is satisfactory rather than good because teachers do not always challenge them enough. They do not consistently move pupils out of a learning 'comfort zone' into areas where greater learning and progress will occur. Where additional support is available, pupils with learning difficulties make good progress. Last year, standards rose for pupils in Years 2 and 6, reflecting the success of strategies put into place to counteract previous staffing difficulties. This is an improvement but standards should still be higher.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. Their spirituality is evident in their sensitivity towards others. This also reflects good social development and their sense of how to contribute to society. For example, pupils talk enthusiastically and very sincerely about how they raised money to buy goats for an African charity. They are very proud of the fact that they bought 35 goats! They are equally proud of how they contribute to the life of their village, for instance by helping to serve dinners to the elderly at the parish luncheon club. Pupils show a clear sense of right and wrong, and choose to behave well. They get along well with each other, in lessons and during break times, whether the weather is fair or foul! The school recognises that it should be doing more to develop pupils' awareness of cultural diversity and is taking steps to improve this, for example through the work of an Indian visitor and the Indian dance workshops sessions that followed this. Attendance is consistently above the national average and reflects pupils' liking for school. The school has improved its provision for information and communication technology and this now provides a satisfactory platform for helping pupils develop some of the skills that will benefit them in adult life, although pupils' progress in developing the key skills of literacy and numeracy, while satisfactory, could be better.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Typically, teaching helps pupils make satisfactory progress but not better than that, for reasons already stated. However, there are times when work is focused sharply on stretching pupils' learning, when it is tailored accurately to meeting their learning needs and when it particularly engages them to learn. This tends to involve times when pupils learn in small groups where they can 'spark' off each other. It is then that progress becomes good and this good practice is what the school recognises it must build on. Equally, the specialist skill that comes with experience of a key stage can only be developed with time and this is also a factor with teachers new to the school. Teachers mark work regularly and some good practice is evident, providing pupils with guidance on how to improve, but this practice is not yet being applied consistently throughout the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum supports pupils' academic learning satisfactorily but does not yet provide a framework within which teachers are guided to stretch pupils' learning even further. In the Foundation Stage, children get a good grounding in the basic skills and are given some good opportunities to practise skills and hence to deepen their grasp of them. However, curriculum planning does not provide enough instances or detail

of how this can be done more extensively to the benefit of children's future learning. The school is successful in providing pupils with opportunities to develop their personal and social skills. It also enables them to extend their learning through other subjects much better now than at the time of the previous inspection. Some of the pupils' artwork in Key Stage 2, for example, is of a good standard. The addition of French to the timetable in Years 3 to 6 has also given pupils further opportunity to extend their learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall. Pupils are well cared for and as a result they flourish personally and socially. Proper procedures are in place for child protection, including procedures for vetting staff. Pupils feel safe and know that they will be supported if they have any worries. The small numbers of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good support in lessons and are happy learners. Parents have very positive views of the school and some point out how much they have noticed, and appreciate, recent improvements. In turn, the school keeps them well informed about their children's progress. Support for academic guidance is less effective than that for personal development. Pupils have targets for learning but these are not yet focused on individual pupils' learning needs.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The school is in a period of considerable change at middle management level. New subject leaders are in place but at this early stage of the year their impact on school performance through monitoring and taking action is limited even though work has started, on assessment for instance. This limited involvement restricts the school's ability to get an in-depth view of its performance although the headteacher's monitoring and her increasingly close and effective partnership with the governing body mean that the school has a reasonably accurate view of how it is doing. The headteacher herself has provided great strength of leadership through recent difficult times. Governance is satisfactory. The governing body is active in supporting and checking the work of the school but realises that it needs further training in this role.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	-----------------------

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	3
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	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	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?	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.

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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

I very much enjoyed the two days I spent at your school recently. Everyone was very kind to me and you were all very helpful when I asked you to tell me about your work or your school. I think that the school is providing you with a satisfactory education and that it is particularly good at helping you to grow into thoughtful and mature young people. Here are some other things that I found to be good:

- Your good behaviour and the way you are keen to learn - you certainly let me know this!
- The good understanding you have of how to live healthily, and why this is so important
- The way you help others, in school, in your village and in the wider world (I think your work in buying goats for African people is excellent and I wish I'd seen you wearing your goat masks! Perhaps there's a picture of this on your brilliant new website?)
- The way everyone in your school takes good care of you
- That so many of you attend school well, hardly missing a day.

To help Dodleston become a good school in every way, I have asked your headteacher and teachers to do some things. Here they are.

- To make sure that in all your lessons you get work that really challenges you to learn well
- To give you more opportunities to do practical investigations in science so that you become good scientists
- To help you set learning targets that will show you that 'the sky's the limit' in what you can achieve - and how to get there!
- To make sure that children in the Reception year always get the chance to experiment and explore in their learning.

You can help by keeping up your good attitudes to work and by really getting involved in agreeing your learning targets with your teachers. Your headteacher is confident that your school will get better and better - and so am I!