

Whitecotes Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112775
Local Authority	DERBYSHIRE LA
Inspection number	289407
Inspection dates	9–10 July 2007
Reporting inspector	Kenneth Thomas

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	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	298
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr P Bullivant
Headteacher	Mr M H Edwards
Date of previous school inspection	26 November 2001
School address	Whitecotes Lane Walton Chesterfield S40 3HJ
Telephone number	01246 234381
Fax number	01246 208519

Age group	5–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Whitecotes Primary is larger than most other primary schools. Pupils are drawn from a large area with a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. A significant proportion come from backgrounds with social and economic difficulties. When children start their Reception year, their knowledge and skills vary widely and are often below expected levels because of weaknesses in language and communication. Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds, with a very small number from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) is below average, while the percentage of pupils with a statement of special educational need is average. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average as is the proportion of pupils starting or leaving the school at times other than the start or end of each school year.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school judges its effectiveness to be satisfactory. Inspectors judge it to be good and they also judge that the school provides good value for money. In this school every child matters and the school's ethos is characterised by a strong commitment to providing an education which meets the needs of each individual pupil. Relationships are excellent and pupils feel safe and secure because of the good quality support and guidance the school provides. Pupils understand the value of healthy lifestyles and make strong contributions to the community. Pupils' personal development is good and they are provided with a firm base for the next stage of their education. This is recognized by the overwhelming majority of parents. One parent wrote, 'This is a lovely school. It has a welcoming atmosphere for both parents and pupils', while another expressed appreciation for the way in which 'Staff work hard to provide an enjoyable yet safe educational environment for children of all abilities'. The school's friendly and welcoming ethos owes much to the very effective leadership of the headteacher.

Provision in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory and children make satisfactory progress, although, because of weaknesses in communication and language, standards remain below average when they enter Year 1. Progress in Years 1 and 2 is good and standards have risen to be above average. For reasons outside the school's control, there have been an unusually large number of staff changes over the last two school years. This led to a heavy workload for the headteacher and others with management responsibilities and had an adverse effect on standards at the end of Year 6. Nevertheless, through good leadership and management and with good support from all staff, the drive for improvement was maintained. As a result all groups of pupils are now making good progress and standards at the end of Year 6 are rising. This, together with rigorous systems for checking the school's performance, gives the school good capacity for further improvement. Progress in literacy is particularly good and standards in English are above those in mathematics and rising more quickly.

The overall quality of teaching is good. In many lessons, pupils make rapid progress because teaching captures their interest and imagination. However, progress is slower in some lessons because pupils spend too much time listening to their teachers and not enough is done to develop their ability to learn independently. Effective use is made of assessment information to monitor pupil's progress and tackle underperformance. The use of individual literacy targets and the guidance given to pupils on what they need to do to achieve their targets is contributing to a rise in standards in English. However, this practice is yet to be established in mathematics.

The curriculum is satisfactory overall and caters adequately for the needs of all groups of pupils. There are strengths in the good range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities. However, the curriculum for children in the Foundation Stage has weaknesses in that there are not enough opportunities for children to make choices and to learn through indoor and outdoor play.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in mathematics by ensuring that pupils are given clear learning targets and guidance on what they must do in order to improve.
- Improve the curriculum for children in the Foundation Stage by providing more opportunities for them to learn through practical and play based activities.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children enter the school with a wide range of skills and abilities, but overall their standards are below average. They make satisfactory progress through Reception and many reach the goals expected for their age, although weaknesses in communication, language and literacy remain. Pupils make good progress in Years 1 and 2, and standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 are above average. Inspection evidence shows that this good progress is being maintained through Years 4 to 6, although this is not fully reflected in the broadly average 2006 national test results. These results were adversely affected by the unusually high rate of teacher turnover. Particularly good progress is made in English where standards are above those in mathematics and rising at a faster rate because of the positive impact of strategies to raise standards of literacy. The standards of boys' reading and writing are below those of girls, and raising boys' standards of literacy is a school improvement priority. The progress of pupils with learning difficulties and or disabilities (LDD) is comparable to that of other pupils. The school sets, and generally achieves, suitably challenging targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The very supportive family atmosphere in the school is seen as a major strength by pupils and parents alike. Pupils speak of feeling safe and secure in school because it is a happy and friendly place to be. As a result pupils gain in confidence and acquire increasingly mature social skills as they move through the school. This maturity arises in part from the good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils in the school, though they could learn more about the variety of cultures in the United Kingdom. Pupils' personal development is strongly supported by the excellent relationships, between pupils, and with adults in the school. Pupils enjoy school and want to do well. This is reflected in their good attendance and good behaviour in lessons and around school. Pupils show a well developed sense of the importance of healthy living. Through membership of the school council, acting as prefects, playground leaders or 'buddies' for younger pupils and through a variety of charitable and other activities, pupils are exceptionally well engaged in the school and the wider communities.. Activities such as these, together with the acquisition of basic skills provide pupils with the adequate preparation for secondary education and for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Most lessons have a good pace and learning activities are carefully planned to stimulate interest and provide an appropriate level of challenge. Because classroom management is very effective, good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning are features of most lessons. Pupils appreciate the efforts of their teachers to make learning interesting and enjoyable. They enjoy lessons of this quality and show real enthusiasm for learning. All groups of pupils make good progress as a result. In some lessons, progress is not as good because there is a lack of variety and pace. In these lessons pupils spend too much time listening to their teachers and are not given enough opportunities to think and learn independently, or to work out answers for themselves before teachers provide an explanation.

In English, assessment is used effectively to identify and share learning targets with pupils so that they have a clear understanding of their progress and their next steps in learning. Although satisfactory, the use of assessment in mathematics does not provide pupils with such clear guidance and is less effective as a result. Good planning and effective support from teaching assistants ensures that pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities participate fully in lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory curriculum. There is a strong focus on the development of key skills in reading and writing and this is having a positive impact on standards. The school is now developing a similar approach in mathematics. Staff have worked successfully to develop the curriculum and to enhance resources for information and communication technology (ICT). This is having a positive impact on standards in ICT. However, there is more to do to ensure that ICT is used to best effect to support learning in other subjects. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities including musical tuition, modern languages and sport. Staff have recently introduced 'themed days' and a programme of visits and visitors. There are additional activities for those pupils recognised as gifted and talented. The successful focus on art and design is reflected in good quality work around the school and pupils particularly appreciate the many opportunities to develop their musical abilities. The curriculum in the Foundation Stage while broadly based on the appropriate areas of learning has weaknesses and there are insufficient opportunities for child chosen activities, and learning through play, both indoors and outdoors.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils and parents are rightly very satisfied with the very good quality of care and support that the school provides. The headteacher and staff know pupils and many of their families really well and are alert to their individual needs and circumstances. The school is rigorous in safeguarding its pupils' health and safety and procedures to ensure pupils' protection, safety and well-being meet statutory requirements. Those with LDD are supported effectively and the school works exceptionally well with outside agencies as and when necessary. Academic guidance is based on the extensive use of assessment information for tracking pupils' progress. This tracking, linked to clear individual literacy targets, is having a significant impact on standards in English. However, the introduction of individual numeracy targets is at an early stage and has yet to have a similar impact on standards in mathematics.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher has shown particularly effective leadership during a period in which an unusually high turnover of staff had an adverse impact on standards at the end of Key Stage 2. With good support from other members of staff, successful management action has led to a significant rise in standards in English and science. Action is now being taken to ensure a similar rise in standards in mathematics. A strong team spirit, together with a clear commitment to continued improvement, lies at the core of all that the school does. The school's self-evaluation is thorough and supported by the regular monitoring of teaching and learning by senior managers. This, together with the careful analysis

of performance information, allows any weaknesses to be identified and tackled. The quality of middle management, while good overall, varies. For example, while the co-ordination of literacy and of provision for pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is particularly effective, co-ordination in some other areas has been adversely affected by the turnover of staff. Governance of the school is good. Governors are very supportive and play an increasingly strategic role in monitoring the school's work and performance. Resources are managed well and financial management is good.

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Annex A

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?	1
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	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?	2
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.

Annex A

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

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

12 July 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Whitecotes Primary School, Chesterfield, S40 3HJ

Following our visit to inspect your school I am now writing to tell you what we found out. Before I do, I would like to say thank you for making us feel so welcome and making our visit one that we will remember for a long time. We have told your teachers how polite and helpful you were, and, through our discussions with you, it was good to hear how much you enjoy school and the many after-school clubs and other activities that are available for you. We particularly enjoyed your singing in assembly and seeing the way you celebrated pupils' achievements.

Our main finding is that this is a good school and one that is helping you to do well. You told us how in most of your lessons, teachers and other staff make learning challenging but fun and this helps you to make good progress. You also told us how your language targets are helping you to make progress because you understand what you need to learn next. We have asked your school to extend the use of targets to other subjects. We have also asked the school to provide more practical and play based learning activities for those of you in the Reception class. The care and support the school provide are good and this is particularly true for those of you who may be experiencing difficulties. You are helped to learn about the importance of keeping fit and staying healthy and safe. Another strength is the way in which Mr. Edwards and his staff run the school and help to make it such an enjoyable place to learn.

You are key players in the school's success and, having met you, we know you will all want to continue to do your best in helping the school to be even better. Through your good behaviour, hard work and the care you show each other, together with willingness to take on responsibility, you all help to make Whitecotes such a happy and successful community.

With best wishes for your future.

Dr Kenneth C Thomas

Lead Inspector