

Victoria Road Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118369
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	291112
Inspection dates	3–4 July 2007
Reporting inspector	Kevin Hodge

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	
School	205
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alan Allcock
Headteacher	Carol Burse
Date of previous school inspection	20 April 2005
School address	Victoria Road Ashford TN23 7HQ
Telephone number	01233 620044
Fax number	01233 664211

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average sized primary school. Just under 10% of pupils come from minority ethnic groups, which is lower than average. Children enter the school with levels of abilities that are below those typical for their age, particularly in their language and number skills. Just over a quarter of the pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities which is higher than in most schools; in some year groups the proportion is greater. The school was identified in June 2003 as needing special measures to help it improve. This requirement was removed when the school was inspected two years later.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Victoria Road is a good school. The headteacher, staff and governors have worked successfully to maintain the rise in pupils' attainment, while improving other areas of provision. Children want to do well, they like attending and mix well together. Parents speak highly of the school. As one aptly noted, 'The school has come on leaps and bounds in the last five years.'

How has the school maintained this recent improvement? Firstly, the staff work hard to make the start to school as smooth as possible by making home visits to see new children. As a result, the provision for children in the Reception class is good and they make good progress. Nearly all reach the expected levels by the time they enter Year 1. Secondly comes typically good teaching and learning. This ensures that most pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make good progress and achieve well. In Years 1 to 6 the more able pupils are not always sufficiently challenged by teachers and make satisfactory progress. At the end of Year 6, standards are broadly average, but there are weaknesses in pupils' writing skills. Their vocabulary is too narrow and the length of their stories and accounts is limited. Pupils achieve particularly well in science, art and physical education.

Very good welfare arrangements, especially for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, have also maintained the school's improvement. These help the children feel safe, able to succeed and contribute to making their care, guidance and support good. Pupils know right from wrong, work together well and appreciate other cultures; their personal development and well-being are good. Although pupils have simple day-to-day responsibilities, these are too limited. This hinders their ability to become independent and motivated to positively influence life in the school community. A good curriculum provides well for pupils to learn the basics as well as science, art and physical activities.

Underpinning the pace of recent improvement is good leadership and management. The headteacher and staff work well as a team and accurately identify areas that need remedy or improvement. As a result, effective action has been taken to raise pupils' attainment and to include parents in school life. Governors give good support and act as effective 'critical friends' to help keep improvements on track.

What the school should do to improve further

- Give pupils in Years 1 to 6 more guidance on writing, so they use a wider vocabulary and write at greater length.
- Ensure that teaching is consistently good in Years 1 to 6 so that pupils, particularly the more able, make good progress.
- Increase pupils' levels of responsibility so they feel more independent and motivated to improve significant aspects of their school community.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well in relation to their starting points. They make up ground and their progress is good in the Reception class. Many reach the expected levels by the end of the year and they develop good attitudes to both school and each other. This good progress generally continues in Years 1 to 6. It sometimes slows in the younger age groups, but accelerates again as pupils reach the two older classes. By the time they leave, pupils reach broadly average standards.

This good progress is due to pupils wanting to learn, an intensive support programme that fosters basic skills and Year 6 having very effective small group teaching. Pupils' written work is often short and lacks flair. The school's own checks on current work indicate that the pupils' progress in Years 1 to 6, including of those with learning difficulties, is generally good. The oldest pupils have met their challenging targets again this year.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' enjoy school. They feel safe and have very good relationships with each other and adults, because their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Children in the Reception class work and play together confidently. These and other children care for classmates so all can enjoy school. As a result they attend regularly. Behaviour is good. Pupils play together very well at playtimes, aided by additional equipment to stimulate their interests. They enjoy the jobs they are given in the day-to-day running of school but they do not have enough opportunities to foster a greater sense of responsibility. The school council for example, exerts some influence, but its involvement in the school and community is at a low level. The benefits of leading healthy lifestyles are understood and adopted well. Pupils take part enthusiastically in a varied range of physical activities during playtimes, often using the new enclosed sports pitch, and take part in after-school clubs. These raise their exercise levels effectively. Pupils' level of basic academic skills, their ability to work well together and their good awareness of local community issues, prepare them well for the next stage of their education and later life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Lessons are typically taught well, although there are some variations between classes. Teachers develop good relationships with pupils and as a result most pupils readily settle to work. Teaching in the Reception class is good. Pupils make a good start because of this and gain independence quickly, stimulated by the very wide range of outside activities. In Years 1 to 6, teaching is also generally good, but does not always stretch the more able pupils. Practical work in all classes is well organised and helps pupils' learning directly. For example, in a Year 1 activity, effective teaching combined science and art to foster pupils' personal attitudes very positively. One pupil sketching live butterflies remarked, 'It's sad to let them go, but it would be cruel to keep them!' Teachers make very good use of audio-visual whiteboards to help illustrate activities and teaching points. Teaching assistants make good contributions to lessons, often providing low key, but effective support. Staff keep a close eye on pupils' general progress and their day-to-day marking is effective. Those with learning difficulties are identified quickly and taught effectively, often in small groups.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is well focused on key skills in English and mathematics, which has led to improvements since the last inspection. The school has accurately identified writing as a weaker element to remedy and is starting, in a limited way, to combine drama and writing activities to stimulate pupils' creative talents. In Year 6, additional activities and booster groups are effective and ensure pupils make particularly good progress. Creative links made across subjects to make

learning more meaningful and enjoyable are taking shape and enliven the curriculum. Programmes that focus directly on the social and emotional aspects of learning develop the pupils' sense of safety and well-being and promote healthy lifestyles. Pupils who find learning difficult or are vulnerable have well devised activities to enable them to make similar progress to others. Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds often have help in small groups to ensure their good progress. The curriculum in the Reception class is exciting and uses a good balance of pupils being able to choose activities and tasks led by adults. Class work is enriched by special activities such as a 'problem solving' day, visits away, including a residential trip to France for the older pupils and visitors to school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Staff work closely with parents and outside agencies to make sure all pupils are cared for conscientiously. Rigorous risk assessment and child protection procedures are effective. As a result, parents appreciate the close attention given to their children and one comment reflected the general view that 'the children are in safe hands'. The school ensures there are good routines to help children make a smooth transition from home to school, for new arrivals from other schools, and to their next school. The Learning Mentor and the Family Liaison Officer effectively identify both parents' and the wide range of pupils' individual needs and take appropriate action to meet these effectively. This often includes helping pupils improve their personal and social skills so that they make better progress and achieve higher standards. Teachers keep good track of pupils' progress. Although setting targets for pupils is established practice, pupils' understanding of them varies between classes and is often superficial. This hampers their ability to guide and improve their own learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher, supported by governors and staff, has successfully built upon the school's improvement noted in the last inspection report. Extra help given to the oldest pupils has paid dividends. Where pupils make slower progress, the school is providing effective support to accelerate their learning. Checks on teaching take place regularly, but identifying and ensuring that the skills needed to stretch the more able pupils are implemented is a weakness. Staff help coordinate their subjects well and their careful checks enable priorities to be included into the succinct, clear and well thought out school strategic plan. Parents' views are valued and acted upon, for example a breakfast club was set up in response to their views. Additional questionnaires for both parents and pupils are used to gauge the effectiveness of actions. Governors use sensible self-evaluation routines to assess what goes on, often through informal, but effective contact with the school. Together with staff, they are modest about the school's overall effectiveness. This is because both have high expectations and want to do even better. The recent rises in standards, improvements to the building and better involvement of parents in school life show that the school has a good capacity to improve further.

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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?	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	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	3
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.

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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

5 July 2007

Dear Children,

Inspection of Victoria Road Primary School, Ashford, Kent TN23 7HQ

Many thanks for looking after us when we visited the school recently. We enjoyed talking to you and finding out what goes on. Yours is a good school. Here are some of the things that we thought were particularly good:

- You all try hard to make Victoria Road a good school and a happy place to be.
- Children in the Reception class learn really well, helped by the exciting outside area.
- You said you feel safe and all the staff make sure that you are.
- Teaching is generally good and teachers try hard to explain things carefully.
- You know about exercising regularly, drinking water and what foods are the best to eat.
- The activities planned in lessons, along with extra help given when needed, help boost your learning.
- You all behave well and keep active at playtimes. The new sports pitch is 'cool'.
- You make good progress in your work and reach average standards by the time you leave.
- You get involved with lots of sports activities and the after school clubs are fun.

Here are the three things we have suggested the school does next to improve some more:

- Help you with your writing skills so you feel more confident to write longer and more interesting stories, for example.
- In Years 1 to 6, we have asked teachers to stretch your thinking more, particularly those of you who like greater challenges.
- Give you more responsibility for helping the staff and governors improve the school and local community. You can help by seriously thinking about what you can do to help your school get even better and then doing it.

Yours faithfully,

Kevin Hodge

Lead inspector