

Rivacre Valley Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	130270
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	293615
Inspection dates	7–8 June 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	
School	124
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Ian Aspden
Headteacher	Mrs Kate Lee
Date of previous school inspection	15 March 2005
School address	Rivacre Brow Overpool Ellesmere Port Cheshire CH66 1LE
Telephone number	0151 3552548
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average school. Pupil numbers declined following the inspection in 2003 but are now gradually rising. Most children start school in Nursery at the age of three years but some join later in the Reception class. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage and live on the estate close by the school. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is much higher than average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very high across the school. There is an exceptionally high proportion of pupils with a statements of special educational need, mostly for behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The school houses the Infant Assessment Unit for the West Cheshire area. This facility assesses and supports children with learning difficulties. Currently seven pupils attend this unit, all of whom have a statement of special educational need. The number of pupils who arrive during the year is much higher than average. Over the last two years about 10 pupils of Irish Traveller heritage have joined the school for three months during the winter. Each year group is quite small and so statistics on standards and progress should be evaluated with care because each pupil counts for about 7%.

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, which has improved rapidly as a result of good leadership and management. Management knows the school well as a result of regular and rigorous checking of its work. It has effectively used the accurate information gained from this process to improve standards across the school. Pupils now achieve well. This has been achieved because teaching is consistently good throughout the school. Parents are delighted with their school and fully support it. They are right to believe that it is well managed, that their children are well cared for and that good teaching helps their children make good progress. Because management, staff and governors are all involved in the comprehensive self-evaluation process and significant improvement has been made since the last inspection, the school has good capacity to improve further. It also gives good value for money.

This school strives to include all pupils in its work and takes good care of them all. It is particularly effective in teaching pupils to tolerate and respect others. It welcomes and works effectively with pupils who join at different times during the school year, who have often been in difficult circumstances. Consequently, parents often express views such as, '[their child] settled so quickly. I was amazed!' Pupils from the Infant Assessment Unit (IAU) are integrated exceptionally well into the class that best suits their learning needs and this helps them make good progress in relation to their capabilities. There are exceptionally high proportions of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who are not in the IAU. They make good progress because small class sizes enable them to have more adult support. Their learning is also enhanced through additional programmes in literacy and numeracy, which are well taught by skilled teaching assistants. The school also has highly effective partnerships with support agencies which share their expertise to help these pupils learn.

Children's attainment on entry is well below that expected for their age. They get a good start in the Foundation Stage classes, where an effective mixture of direct teaching and play activities helps children gain independence and make good progress. Throughout the school, teachers effectively help pupils to overcome barriers to learning. Pupils are challenged at every stage because assessment data is used well, both to monitor their progress and to plan their learning. They behave well and try their hardest in lessons, which has a positive impact on the progress they make. As a result, by the end of Year 6 pupils attain standards that are broadly average. This is a significant improvement on standards in previous years. However, pupils' writing skills, despite the school's best efforts to improve them, remain a relative weakness, often because pupils have quite narrow vocabularies. The good curriculum has emphasised literacy and numeracy as the school has sought to raise standards. The school has yet to plan opportunities for pupils to use their basic skills in other subjects on a consistent basis.

Pupils like school and the interesting way their teachers present tasks. They know that staff will keep them safe and are always ready to help if they have a problem. Those pupils with responsibilities are exceptionally good at helping others. The choir is particularly successful and recently sang at the inauguration of the local mayor, a governor of the school. However, attendance remains stubbornly below average despite the good efforts of the school to improve it.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide more opportunities for pupils to use and develop their basic skills in other subjects so as to raise standards further.

- Improve pupils' attendance.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

When children start school, many have very weak language skills and lack the independence to do things for themselves. They make good progress in all six areas of learning but their language skills remain a weaker area. By the time children enter Year 1, standards are usually below average. In 2006, a more able group of children reached standards that were average. Standards are average at the end of both key stages. Effective teaching has halted the decline in test results over the last four years. Pupils throughout the school make good progress from their starting points. This is particularly noteworthy when account is taken of the many difficulties pupils face and the high number who join the school during Key Stage 2. However, at Key Stage 1, pupils' writing skills are a relatively weaker area, with no pupils achieving Level 3 in the 2006 national tests. The gains made here are not as great as in other subjects because despite good teaching, pupils have quite a lot of ground to make up. The standards reached by these pupils represent particularly good progress because two out of every three of them had learning difficulties. Test results at the end of Key Stage 2 rose dramatically to average in 2006, with the school reaching its challenging targets. Standards in Year 6 are currently similar to those of last year. Pupils of Irish Traveller heritage make steady progress while they are in school. However, they leave school at very short notice and so the school is unable to offer them support while they are on the road. On their return, they have often fallen a long way behind their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. Pupils are very kind and supportive of each other. For example, older pupils work very sensibly with younger ones during reading sessions. Pupils called 'peer mediators' are always available to help or respond to concerns at playtime. The school council is especially active in promoting pupils' ideas to management and even talks directly to the governing body, for example to get funding for playground equipment. Breaktimes and lunchtimes are a good opportunity to exercise and most pupils enjoy joining in with the many games on offer, which are capably led by lunchtime staff. Pupils make healthy food choices and also know to avoid smoking, alcohol and drugs because as many children say, 'they are really bad for you'. Pupils say they enjoy school, but their attendance is below average. This is partly because some pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have lengthy absences for medical problems. Also, pupils of Irish Traveller heritage spend many months away from school. Pupils say that they feel safe in school. 'Everyone is nice to each other and the teachers would sort out any bullying' is a commonly held view.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Classes, especially for literacy and numeracy, are small so each pupil receives a great deal of individual support. This raises their confidence and self-esteem, as well as having a really positive impact on their learning, particularly for those with learning difficulties and/or

disabilities. A good example of this is when pupils from the IAU join with the Reception class for literacy and numeracy sessions. All staff manage their classes exceptionally well through effective use of praise and rewards, creating an atmosphere in which everyone can learn. They make learning interesting; for example, in Year 3 and 4 they encouraged pupils to taste Indian food as part of a geography project. Teachers make effective use of questioning, often gently probing pupils' understanding in order to consolidate their learning. However, they are too ready to accept the first response rather than asking pupils to rephrase their answer in a sentence which uses better vocabulary. Teaching assistants are very patient with the pupils they work with. Though the tasks are often repetitive, for example work on letter sounds, they change activities frequently and use games well to maintain pupils' interest and improve their understanding. Teachers make good use of resources so that pupils have something practical to do to help them learn effectively. For example, pupils in Year 1 and 2 gave instructions to a robotic toy to help them understand about measuring amounts of turn.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good because it meets the pupils' needs well. It has successfully focused on improving pupils' literacy and numeracy skills in these lessons. At the same time there has been a good balance with practical work such as digital art and vegetable gardening, which keeps the pupils' interest. There are few links between subjects and so pupils have too few planned opportunities to use and improve their basic skills in other subjects, for instance through reading for research in history or extensive report writing in science. The good programme of personal, social, health and emotional education is very successful. Pupils know not only how to stay fit and healthy but also how to behave in a calm and orderly way and to help others. For a small school there is a good range of extra clubs, visits and visitors. Pupils look forward with great expectation to the Year 5 and 6 residential visit during which many will stay away from home for the first time.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

All pupils, and especially the most vulnerable, are well cared for. Staff know every pupil individually and are always alert should they arrive at school upset in any way. Ample time is given over to 'talk things through' and the learning mentor is highly effective in this respect. The required procedures to safeguard pupils are in place. The school is well regarded by the Travelling community. It has been successful in gaining their trust. Bringing new pupils into school is handled very sensitively and a new programme of sessions to prepare pupils for high school is also proving successful in taking the worry out of this transition. Attendance is checked quite closely and 100% attendance is rewarded, but this has not been enough to improve it. Pupils have a very good idea of how to improve work in their writing assessment books because high quality marking provides clear pointers as to what has been done well and what pupils need to do next. Teachers' marking in other books is not so comprehensive and so pupils are unsure how they can improve that work further.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Effective leadership by the governing body and headteacher in partnership has transformed pupils' learning. Everyone is committed to improving provision for the pupils and it is this common sense of purpose which has brought about the positive changes. Teamwork starts with the school's self-evaluation which involves staff and governors and also gathers information from parents and pupils. This enables everyone to feel involved and to have an understanding of what the school is like now and where future planning will take them. Management keeps a thorough check on teaching and learning and provides support when needed, in order to improve it. Pupils' progress is checked every term. Should any pupil fall behind then additional support is quickly offered. The inspection agrees with the school's review of the curriculum. This has identified that in order to improve pupils' basic skills further they need to be used purposefully in other subjects. Governance is good. Governors have supported the school well through challenging circumstances and are well informed from their personal visits in order to hold the school to account for its performance. They maintain a particularly close watch over the complex finances, planning up to four years in advance.

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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	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	1
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	1
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**

Inspection of Rivacre Valley Primary School, Ellesmere Port, CH66 1LE.

I am pleased to tell you that the inspection went well for the school and that you played a big part in the outcomes. I agree with you that yours is a good school because good teaching helps you make good progress in English, mathematics and science. You like your school very much because teachers make 'learning fun'. Also you told me that they keep you safe and listen to you when you have concerns and I agree with all these statements. I thought that you all help exceptionally well in school and that your school council works very hard to make the school a better place for you.

Here are some other aspects of your school which were good.

- You are very kind towards each other, behave well and are keen to learn.
- There is a good range of after-school clubs and visits, including a residential visit for Years 5 and 6, which you all enjoy.
- The headteacher and her staff are very special people who work very hard to make the school a better place for you all.

Even good schools like yours need to improve further so I have asked the headteacher to do two things which will make it even better for you:

- give you more chances to improve your literacy, numeracy and computer skills in other subjects
- improve your attendance.

You can help your school to improve by coming on time every day, by trying hard to answer the teachers' questions and by continuing to do your best in every lesson. Thank you very much for being so helpful to me. I valued your views and used them when making my judgements about the school. I hope that you are very proud of all that the staff, governors and you have achieved so far and wish you well for the future.