

Highfield Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131421
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	293749
Inspection dates	27–28 March 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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	246
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr C Whitney
Headteacher	Mr John Evans
Date of previous school inspection	12 February 2001
School address	Blacon Point Road Blacon Chester Cheshire CH1 5LD
Telephone number	01244 377455
Fax number	01244 370278

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average sized school. The number of pupils on roll has declined since the last inspection and as a result the school is in the process of relocating to one site. The pupils are predominantly of White British heritage. The local area has higher than average levels of economic disadvantage and the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportions of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and of those with a statement of special educational need are both above average. The school has an infant assessment unit, which currently educates five pupils, all of whom have a statement of special educational need. The current headteacher was appointed in January 2006. Prior to his appointment there was a long period of instability in the leadership of the school with several temporary headteachers in charge. The school is part of the Blacon Education Village, a group of primary schools and the local high school which work together closely.

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. The inspection agrees with the school's view of itself. Pupils really enjoy their school and arrive with a spring in their step and a smile on their face. They do this because they know that the staff really care about them and want them to succeed in all they do. Parents say that there has been an amazing improvement since the arrival of the headteacher. Comments like this were common: 'The teachers and the school have been energised and there is a real purpose and focus on the children and education'.

Outstanding leadership by the headteacher, with the active support of the whole school community, has stabilised the school after a period of temporary leadership. Management has very high expectations for all pupils. Both the pupils and teachers are working hard to live up to them. Good systems for checking the school's performance are giving managers a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They thus have a clear picture of standards and provision and this is shared regularly with the governing body. Good leadership and management are vigorously addressing the issues of low standards and the slow progress pupils made during the school's unsettled time. Pupils are now making good progress and standards across the school are rising. These factors indicate that effective steps have been taken, albeit much has happened more recently, to improve the school since the last inspection. The way in which the school is moving forward rapidly demonstrates that it has a good capacity to improve further.

Children join the school with attainments that are well below national expectations. Good provision in the Foundation Stage gives children a solid base for their future learning. Pupils' overall achievement is good despite standards being below average by Year 6. In 2006, this was mainly because too few pupils reached the higher level expected of them. Good teaching is now ensuring that each ability group is provided with tasks that challenge their understanding and standards are rising. Effective use is made of teaching assistants to assist pupils' learning both in the classroom and in taking groups for additional support programmes. Pupils in the assessment unit make good progress in relation to their capabilities. They work hard at their basic skills and enjoy working alongside their peers in subjects like information and communication technology (ICT) and art.

A broad curriculum, which also offers an extensive range of clubs and excellent residential visits, accounts for pupils' enjoyment of school. Since the new computers have been installed, pupils' progress in ICT has accelerated rapidly, but older pupils still have some gaps in their knowledge and understanding stemming from the past when provision was not as good. This has resulted in some lack of confidence in their ability to use ICT. Outstanding partnerships with local schools and the community offer pupils an extensive range of opportunities, such as a recent multi-faith dance festival, which they would not otherwise experience. Pupils' personal development is flourishing. Their behaviour is good and they get on very well with each other. They have a good understanding of how to improve their work from teachers' detailed marking.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards in English, mathematics and science.
- Ensure that pupils leave the school confident in their ability to use their ICT skills effectively.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

On entry to Nursery many children have weak speaking and listening skills and a narrow experience of life. Good teaching in a spacious and well resourced environment helps children make good progress. Parents of these children say: 'We are amazed at all the new things they learn.' They are delighted with the rapid progress their children are making with early reading and writing skills. In 2006 many children reached the national expectations by the end of Reception class. In Years 1 and 2 standards have fallen in previous years but now as a result of good teaching and better progress, standards are rising and in lessons they are now broadly average. At the end of Year 6 in 2006 pupils' national test results, although significantly below average, represented good progress across Key Stage 2. Test results have been below average for five years. The governing body sets challenging targets, which were nearly met in 2006. Standards in the current Year 6 are improving although still below average. However, this does represent good progress for these pupils from their results in the Key Stage 1 tests in 2003.

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those in the assessment unit, make good progress towards the targets set for them. They are well taught by staff who skilfully combine sensitivity with a drive for higher standards.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. One parent's view, which encapsulates the views of many, is that pupils 'really love coming to school and that is the biggest compliment a school can get!' Pupils' attendance is improving rapidly and is currently average. This reflects their enjoyment of school and the effective work of the school in this area. They are well aware of how to live healthily, for example as shown when choosing to buy healthy snacks at break time. This initiative is managed by older pupils and helps them develop an awareness of handling money and of customer relations. Most pupils behave well, are polite to each other and adults and move around the school sensibly. Pupils report that there is no oppressive behaviour and should any occur they would report it, safe in the knowledge that it would be dealt with. The good school council is an elected body which manages its own budget effectively in order to improve the school for the pupils. The process gives pupils an opportunity to experience how democracy works. The school is also active in the wider community, for example raising money for charity.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Pupils enjoy school and want to learn because teachers treat them fairly and are good role models. Lessons are interesting and challenging and engage pupils well. Parents say that their children 'feel supported and challenged in their work' because teachers now have higher expectations of what pupils can do and achieve. The pupils respond well by working enthusiastically to meet them. Pupils consolidate their learning by contributing their ideas and explaining their methods in response to good questioning. This was done particularly well in a Year 4 lesson on problem-solving. Teachers are now making better use of assessment information to ensure that pupils of all abilities are set tasks which

meet their needs. Teachers' marking is detailed. It tells pupils what they have done well and what they need to do to improve their work further. Pupils are encouraged to work independently and cooperatively and do so well in all classes. They frequently mark each other's work sensitively and responsibly, using the clear guidance given to them by the teacher.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and meets the needs of the pupils well. An emphasis on literacy and numeracy is helping to improve pupils' progress in these key areas. Since the new computers have been installed, pupils' progress in developing their ICT skills is improving well. Aspects of pupils' good personal development come about because the school makes excellent use of its links with partners to educate them on relationships, misuse of drugs and alcohol and much more. Pupils' sense of self-worth is greatly enhanced by the wonderful displays of high quality artwork in all areas of the school. There are ample opportunities to exercise during physical education lessons and the very well attended sports clubs. An excellent range of residential visits contributes well to pupils' independence and development of their good social skills. Good provision for pupils with special gifts or talents, making effective use of links with the high school, helps these pupils extend their skills and knowledge in sports, the arts and a foreign language.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support offered to the pupils are good. Parents say,

'All of the staff are helpful and approachable and always ready to listen to any concerns we may have.' This illustrates how staff are fully committed to caring for the pupils. The vast majority of parents returning the questionnaire say that their children are kept safe in school because there is little, if any, bullying. Procedures for safeguarding pupils are in place. Risk assessments are thorough. Parents are well informed about their children's progress and attainment in English, mathematics and science but information on other subjects is less detailed. Any pupils potentially at risk are identified very early, partly because there are strong links with pre-school agencies. They and their parents are offered extensive support. Pupils' attendance and punctuality have improved because of the good work of the learning mentor. Parents of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities feel well informed about their children's progress and about additional support.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership and management of the school are good. The whole school community shares the view that pupils' standards could be higher and is working collectively and effectively to achieve that aim. Excellent leadership by the headteacher has brought about this change in culture. Management maintains a close watch on pupils' progress through termly assessments. Challenging targets are set for class teachers and they are effective in meeting and sometimes exceeding them. This is contributing to the good progress that most pupils make. The school is well aware of its strengths and areas for development and future plans lay out a clear timetable for improvement. Subject management is good. Managers have a realistic picture of pupils'

standards and of the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects through their regular monitoring. They have been instrumental in raising teachers' expectations and improving pupils' progress. The management of the provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. Parents write that staff deal with their children's individual needs with great sensitivity. Governance is good. Governors give the headteacher and staff their full support in raising standards. They keep a careful check on finances to ensure that the school offers good value for money.

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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	1
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	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

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

Thank you for making us so welcome during our recent visit. We enjoyed speaking with you and hearing your views about the school. We agree with you that yours is a good school. You told us that your headteacher had improved the school a great deal since he came to the school and we think he, along with all the other staff, has done a good job. Good teaching helps you make good progress in English, mathematics and science. We agree that your teachers care very much about you and you like this. You enjoy school a great deal, come to school regularly and work hard in lessons. When we asked you what you liked about school you gave us a very long list of things, such as your teachers, interesting lessons, visits and sports clubs. We found that these things were good. We think that the number of visits where you 'sleep over' is exceptionally good. When we spoke to some older pupils they told us all about the teachers' marking and your individual learning targets. We think that this system is good because it helps you improve your work.

Even good schools like yours need to improve further. We have asked the headteacher to do the following to make school an even better place for you.

- Improve your attainment in English, mathematics and science by the end of Key Stage 2. We would particularly like the school to help more of you reach Level 5.
- Make sure that when older pupils leave school they are more confident in using their ICT skills.

You can help your school by continuing to:

- come to school every day
- work hard in lessons in order to achieve your learning targets.

Thank you very much for helping us so well with our inspection. We hope that you are all proud of what you, the staff, governors and your parents have achieved and wish you and the school all the best for the future.