

Smithdown Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131597
Local Authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	293791
Inspection dates	22–23 February 2007
Reporting inspector	Paul Bamber

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	207
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr N Christian
Headteacher	Mrs Crowe
Date of previous school inspection	26 March 2001
School address	Chatsworth Drive Liverpool Merseyside L7 6LJ
Telephone number	0151 7096229
Fax number	0151 7096229

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This average sized school serves an area of considerable social and economic disadvantage. As a result many pupils present considerable challenge and experience significant barriers to effective learning. The proportions of pupils who come from minority ethnic backgrounds, use English as an additional language and who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are higher than found nationally. The percentages of those entitled to a free school meal and those leaving or entering the school at times other than the usual are much higher than average. The school has a Healthy School award and a Sportsmark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13(3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to pupils' achievement and standards, especially that of girls and of the more able pupils. Consequently, the school provides inadequate value for money.

The school does have strengths. Pupils' personal development is good. Pupils enjoy school and behave well, reflecting the very positive ethos created by the headteacher and staff. The school successfully overcomes many of the considerable personal, social and emotional challenges faced by a significant minority of pupils.

Pupils who enter the school, at whatever time and from whatever background, are instantly included and welcomed by the whole school community. Those who start in the Nursery or Reception classes make a fine start to their education because the provision for them is good. Relationships throughout the school are very positive. Standards of pupils' basic skills are well below average throughout the school. Overall, pupils' achievement is inadequate. This applies particularly to girls, especially in Years 3 to 6 and to the more able pupils. Pupils whose first language is not English achieve satisfactorily, sometimes well, because they have well focused support.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory and improving but has not yet had enough impact on raising the achievement of older pupils. Tasks set do not always sufficiently challenge pupils or match their specific needs well enough. Occasionally, the otherwise effective learning support assistants are underused because they are not deployed to support individual pupils or groups of pupils throughout the whole lesson. The curriculum satisfactorily meets pupils' needs. Its focus on promoting pupils' awareness of the benefits of a balanced diet and regular exercise and of their own and different cultures are strengths. In contrast, pupils are not always encouraged to practise their basic skills across many areas of their learning.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Recently, the newly created leadership team, driven by a thoughtful and determined headteacher, has implemented several systems to track pupils' progress and to check on the quality of teaching and learning. The impact of these initiatives and those for more focused interventions to support slower learners are already beginning to raise achievement. Improvement has been inadequate overall since the last inspection. While the school's improvement in addressing the key issues from the previous inspection has been relatively slow, in other areas such as in the enhancement of the interior and exterior of the school building, improvement has been good.

The school's self-evaluation is satisfactory. Recent improvements in the quality of teaching and in the systems to track pupils' progress demonstrate that the school knows what to do to further improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement, especially that of girls in Years 3 to 6 and the more able, so that all pupils make at least satisfactory progress.
- Ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is consistently good enough to overcome the barriers to learning experienced by a significant minority of pupils.

- Help pupils to understand better the links between different areas of their learning and to use their basic skills more frequently in all subjects.
- Deploy learning assistants more effectively to support pupils, especially the more vulnerable, throughout the whole lesson.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

After a good start in the Nursery and Reception classes, where children achieve well, their progress slows through Years 1 to 6 and they do not all achieve as well as they should. Many children enter Nursery with very low skills compared with those expected. Despite achieving well because of effective teaching and support, they enter Year 1 with below average standards in many areas of their learning.

From Years 3 to 6 many pupils underachieve. The pupils who have the best achievement tend to be those whose first language is not English, many of whom enter the school at times other than normal. As soon as they acquire an understanding of English many of these pupils achieve well and reach at least expected standards in the Year 6 national tests. Least good achievement is that of girls, especially those in Years 3 to 6, and that of the more able pupils. The standards pupils reach in the Year 2 teacher assessments have been significantly below average over the last five years. This has also been the case in the Year 6 national tests, apart from in 2004 when standards were average. The school sets realistic but unchallenging targets. Nevertheless, pupils' achievement is improving as a result of better teaching.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development is good because their confidence in themselves increases and they gain knowledge and understanding that stand them in good stead for their future lives. What the school does really well is to enable pupils to get on famously with each other and to celebrate their cultural diversity. They feel valued as individuals. Pupils feel safe in school because they are confident that any difficulties that arise, such as bullying, will be dealt with promptly and effectively. A contributory factor in this is that pupils are aware of the needs of others and are prepared to take steps to safeguard them. They also show this through their charitable fund-raising. As a result of the school's work with the police pupils know how to stay safe. Pupils know what is needed to live healthy lives, including the importance of exercise. They understand how to make healthy eating choices but do not always do so. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils have opportunities for reflection, for example, in assemblies. Artwork around the school demonstrates their confidence in expressing ideas and celebrates pupils' home cultures. Pupils readily accept responsibility and contribute to the school community, for example as play leaders or through their membership of the school council. They say that they really enjoy being in school. Nevertheless, the achievement of a few pupils is adversely affected by poor punctuality and erratic attendance. In this respect, they are not sufficiently developing essential workplace skills for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory and improving. All teaching observed was at least satisfactory and some was good. However, there is not yet enough consistently good teaching to overcome the significant barriers to learning experienced by many pupils and to show impact on the achievement of older pupils. Overall, pupils with English as an additional language are supported effectively and this plays a key role in enabling them to achieve at least satisfactorily. A strength in teaching throughout the school is the way in which teachers and support staff promote positive relationships and pupils' enjoyment in learning. The sensitive but firm way in which pupils' behaviour is managed means that lessons are orderly. Nevertheless, the expectations of the quality and quantity of pupils' work are on occasions too low, and this contributes to their underachievement. Teachers' marking is often congratulatory and descriptive but not consistently analytical and constructively critical. This means that some pupils remain unaware of what exactly they need to do to improve their work. Until recently, the interventions to support pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have been limited in their effectiveness. Recent training for the staff providing this support means that the quality of intervention is now more effective and learning is improving.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and although it provides well for pupils' personal development the opportunities that allow pupils to develop their basic literacy and numeracy skills through subjects other than English and mathematics are not consistent. The school recognises the need to develop the curriculum further to include more practical approaches to learning. Plans are firmly in place to do so. A good range of extra-curricular activities, visiting speakers, musicians, sports teachers and theatre groups underpin the curriculum. Pupils visit local centres of interest and places that are relevant to their learning, particularly in promoting their good cultural development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school takes really good care of its pupils. There are well developed systems to ensure their welfare, including effective partnerships with outside agencies. The school does all it reasonably can to promote punctuality and good attendance but improvement is slow. Procedures to safeguard pupils and to ensure their safety are in place. Good support is provided for the vulnerable pupils, those who are new to the school and those at an early stage of learning English. Overall, classroom support assistants provide sensitive targeted support that enables pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make similar progress to their classmates. The school has a wealth of data that enables pupils' progress to be checked. Although this is analysed and available, it is not yet consistently used well enough in planning lessons to ensure that all pupils are challenged sufficiently or able to make step-by-step progress in their learning. It is for these reasons that care, guidance and support are judged to be satisfactory rather than good.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher provides reflective and determined leadership and has made effective contributions to the school's positive ethos, to pupils' good personal development and to the sensitive care and support pupils receive. The headteacher has had good support from the recently established leadership team and from the local authority in setting up secure systems to track and check pupils' progress and the quality of provision. Effective partnerships have been forged with local schools which have enhanced pupils' learning and teachers' professional development, resulting in improved teaching. Despite these strengths, the systems to ensure higher standards and to improve pupils' achievement have yet to bear fruit and it is only now that the school is becoming fully aware of the specific reasons why certain groups of pupils underachieve. However, recent changes to the way the effectiveness of staff is judged now focus more on individual class teachers' accountability for pupils' achievement and for whole-school performance. There is also clear evidence of improvement in the way in which pupils' progress is tracked. This demonstrates a satisfactory capacity for further improvement. Governors carry out their roles and responsibilities satisfactorily, offering good support and increasing challenge. They have a well organised committee structure. Subject leaders work well as a team and are hard working. However, their work is sometimes too focused on improving provision rather than on how they can impact specifically on improving pupils' learning and achievement.

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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?	4
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
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	No

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4

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	3
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.

Annex A

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	4
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?	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for making us welcome during the days we spent in your school. Although we found many good things, we think it could do better in some important areas.

Here are the good things about your school.

- You get on very well together and children new to the school are welcomed warmly.
- You enjoy school and behave well.
- All the adults in the school look after you very well and give a lot of help to those of you who have any problems.
- The children in the Nursery and the Reception classes get off to a really good start.

Some things are not going so well.

- Quite a lot of you, especially the girls and those of you who find learning easier, do not make as much progress as you should. Some of you can help with this by attending more regularly and coming to school on time every day.
- We have asked your headteacher and the governors to make sure that all your teaching helps you to make better progress, and to make sure that the other adults who help you in class support your learning for the whole lesson.
- You do not practise your reading, writing, mathematics and information and communications technology (ICT) skills enough in all subjects.

Thank you for helping us with the inspection of your school. We hope that you will work really hard and continue to enjoy school.