



Firs Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 131725
Local Authority Birmingham
Inspection number 293830
Inspection dates 30 November –1 December 2006
Reporting inspector Bogusia Matusiak-Varley

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary	School address	Dreghorn Road
School category	Community		Castle Bromwich
Age range of pupils	3–11		Birmingham B36 8LL
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0121 4643792
Number on roll (school)	420	Fax number	0121 464 5519
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Bill Griffiths
		Headteacher	Alison Walsh
Date of previous school inspection	16 March 2001		

Age group 3–11	Inspection dates 30 November –1 December 2006	Inspection number 293830
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is in an area of high social and economic disadvantage. The characteristics of the school have changed considerably since the inspection of 2001. There has been a significant increase in the number of pupils eligible for free school meals, now standing at 64%, which is well above the national average. There are many social issues facing this disadvantaged community. The number of pupils learning English as an additional language has also increased and is above the national average with 30% of pupils being at very early stages of learning English. An above average number of pupils have learning difficulties and disabilities including statements of special education need. There is a high level of pupils entering and leaving the school during the academic year and this has a significant impact on pupils' standards and achievement as many pupils entered for the national tests arrive at the school with standards below the national average. The school faces many barriers in raising standards. A high percentage of senior staff have recently left for promotion. Attainment on entry to the Nursery is well below that expected of children of similar ages, as is attainment on entry to Year 1, as a high percentage of children leave the school when they have completed the Foundation Stage.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is an improving school that rightly judges its effectiveness as being satisfactory. Whilst it faces many barriers to raising standards, pupils are constantly encouraged to 'reach for the stars'. The school is poised to raise standards because the highly dedicated headteacher has ensured that good systems are in place to raise pupils' achievement but, as yet, their impact is not reflected in the national tests. School self-evaluation is accurate and, as a result, improvement can be seen in the quality of teaching, which is satisfactory with good features, especially in Years 2, 5, and 6. 'There is still a lot to do, but we know what needs to be done and we can do it,' is the headteacher's motto as she skilfully leads her staff into raising their game in providing good learning opportunities for their pupils. However, presentation of pupils' written work in books is unsatisfactory. The quality of teachers' marking does not always tell pupils how to improve their work. This often results in pupils repeating mistakes.

Pupils enter the school gates cheerily in the morning knowing that they are safe and well cared for in school. 'Our teachers expect the best from us, we are always listened to and we know that we are cared for,' said one pupil in Year 6 speaking for the majority!

Standards in English, mathematics and science are below average at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 but pupils' achievements, including those learning English as an additional language and with learning difficulties and disabilities, are satisfactory. More capable pupils generally make satisfactory progress but there are times when they are not consistently challenged. This is because not all staff use the detailed information that is available from assessment to plan activities that challenge pupils sufficiently. Standards are restricted by the very high proportion of pupils entering and leaving the school at different times during the academic year. In information and communication technology (ICT), pupils achieve well and attain average standards. The school's own records show that those pupils who have been at the school since the Foundation Stage are making satisfactory progress. 2006 national test results show a slight improvement on 2005 results but there are still weaknesses in writing, problem solving and mental mathematics.

Children make satisfactory progress in relation to their very low starting points and, whilst they do not attain the expected levels on entry to Year 1, they make good progress in personal, social and emotional development. Whilst provision in the Foundation stage is satisfactory overall, too few opportunities are provided for children in Reception and pupils in Year 1 to develop correct letter and number formation. This means that teachers from Year 2 onwards have to teach basic writing skills.

Care, guidance and support are good, especially the pastoral care. Coupled with good learning opportunities and effective support from teachers and support staff, pupils behave well and develop good attitudes towards learning. They know about healthy lifestyles, how to stay safe and they achieve economic well-being through the many opportunities that are provided for them to work in teams and take on responsibility.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets children's needs well. It is enriched by a good range of visits and activities.

Leadership and management are satisfactory, overall. The headteacher has created a very orderly learning community. Senior leaders support the headteacher in her endeavours to raise standards by monitoring pupils' progress but they are not yet monitoring teachers' planning rigorously enough. All things considered, with secure procedures now in place and a determination to succeed, the school has good capacity for improvement. Parents unanimously agree that their children love school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards through more effective use of assessment information and ensuring more capable pupils are fully challenged.
- Ensure that children in the Foundation Stage and Year 1 are given more opportunities to form their letters and numbers correctly.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that it matches the best practice in school and marking tells pupils how to improve their work and its presentation.
- Ensure that senior leaders take a more active role in helping to raise standards and pupils' rates of progress by ensuring all teachers plan appropriate lessons.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are below average and pupils' achievement, although inconsistent, is satisfactory overall. The school narrowly missed its ambitious targets in 2006 with several Year 6 pupils just missing average levels by one point. Children in the Foundation Stage make good progress in personal, social and emotional development and satisfactory progress in all other areas of learning but do not attain the expected standards.

The school acknowledges standards need to be higher. Good tracking and assessment procedures now enable teachers to identify very clearly the levels at which pupils are working. Some more capable pupils do not always make the expected progress because teachers do not make the best use of information from assessment to plan work at the right level for them.

Those pupils learning English as an additional language and the high percentage of those with learning difficulties and disabilities make satisfactory progress because they are provided with effective support. The school has rightly recognised that progress in writing, problem solving and mental mathematics is too variable and staff's performance management targets reflect these areas for improvement.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development, as well as their spiritual, moral and social development, are good. Pupils' behaviour is good, both in lessons and around the school. They are

very welcoming to visitors with inspectors being greeted with cheery 'hellos'. Attendance is below average but the school is doing all it can with the help of the learning mentor to raise levels.

Pupils have a good understanding of right and wrong and show good care and consideration for each other. The wide range of responsibilities they have around the school successfully enables pupils of all ages to contribute to the school community. The younger ones are especially appreciative of the support they receive for the older peer mediators in the playground. Pupils from different cultures get on well with each other. Pupils have a good understanding of how and why they need to lead a healthy lifestyle and stay safe. They influence what happens in school by the discussions in the school and class councils and this contributes to their economic achievement and well-being. They acquire good team building skills and, as one pupil said, 'We are allowed to make mistakes as it's the best way to learn.'

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Many lessons provide plenty of opportunities for pupils to talk about their work; this is a key factor in the sound gains that pupils learning English as an additional language make. Throughout the school, teachers manage lessons well, creating a calm and purposeful atmosphere for pupils. Classroom displays are outstanding. They are informative, display key words for learning and honour the pupils' hard work.

Teachers take most opportunities to make learning fun and use ICT well to support learning. However, there are inconsistencies in the way data from assessment is used to challenge more capable pupils. A weakness in the Nursery, Reception and Year 1 is the teaching of correct letter and number formation and opportunities for pupils to record their work. This restricts pupils' rates of progress as they move up the school. As a result, standards of pupils' written work are unsatisfactory.

Teachers' planning does not always take into consideration the needs of different ability groups, especially more capable pupils, and this restricts learning. Teachers' marking, whilst satisfactory overall, does not always tell pupils how to improve the quality of their work. Good examples of marking were seen in Year 5 and Year 6.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is broad, balanced and meets children's needs and interest levels. 'Teachers always make work interesting, there aren't many schools where we get so many visits and visitors,' said one Year 6 pupil. The curriculum is well enriched with a good range of extra-curricular activities and visits, including a residential trip to France. The curriculum is vibrant, exciting and use is made of local places of interest such as Blakesley Hall. The curriculum in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory with an

appropriate balance between play and learning but planning does not sufficiently take into account the need for more capable children to record their work.

The school has effectively reviewed the curriculum and has introduced themes and links across different subjects. Literacy, numeracy and ICT are used well in all subjects. Good attention is given to teaching pupils about being safe, keeping healthy, understanding emotions and the part they play in being good citizens within the community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Staff support pupils' personal needs very well, resulting in pupils being happy and confident. Pupils say they feel safe and are willing to go to any of the adults in school if they have a problem. Very good child protection procedures and extensive health and safety arrangements are in place. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and those with English as an additional language have individual learning plans that identify clear targets to ensure that they make satisfactory progress overall.

There are good systems in place for monitoring pupils' academic achievements. Nevertheless, there is some inconsistency in the way staff use this information. Not all teachers provide sufficient guidance to help pupils improve as the marking of pupils' work does not always explain how to work better.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher provides good leadership and management and is effective in evaluating the school's work. The headteacher has been very successful in reducing incidents of weaker teaching by coaching staff so that they now produce at least satisfactory lessons. The headteacher has very effective management systems in place to ensure that staff and resources are used well. Although the senior leadership team knows what needs to be done to raise standards, members are not yet monitoring teachers' planning rigorously enough to improve pupils' rates of achievement and this is why leadership and management is judged as satisfactory rather than good.

Parents have a high opinion of the school. 'They do a really good job with our kids,' said one of the parents. Governance of the school is satisfactory. The governing body supports the school well. Governors fulfil their statutory duties but are not yet evaluating the effectiveness of their spending decisions and the impact these have on pupils' achievement.

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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
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?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

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	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?	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.

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	3
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?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

What an interesting two days we spent with you during our visit to your school! Your classrooms are a delight, particularly displays of your art work, masks and sculptures. You are aware of the importance of coming to school and have worked with your learning mentor to improve attendance but, as you well know, there is still some way to go. You are well behaved, kind to one another, work well in teams and respect one another's points of view. The school council and peer mediators do a good job at improving playground provision so that no one feels left out and it is good to know that you are aware of which members of staff to turn to if you need help. Your headteacher is doing a good job at ensuring that you have all that you need in order to learn and your visit to France is impressive. You are well looked after, teaching is satisfactory and you have good learning opportunities which you enjoy, as seen by your good attitudes to learning.

We have asked your headteacher, the staff and governing body to improve a few things to help you learn at a faster rate. You can play a part in this by asking your teachers to tell you how you are doing in tests and what you need to do in order to improve your work. Those of you who find learning easy can ask for work that makes you think even harder and all of you could write more neatly. Those of you who are in the youngest classes and Year 1 need to try harder at forming your letters and numbers correctly and write more about what you do in lessons. We have also asked teachers with responsibilities to help your headteacher more to help you reach higher standards.

We wish you all the best for the future.