



The Arches Community Primary School.

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 134897
Local Authority Cheshire
Inspection number 294209
Inspection dates 11–12 September 2006
Reporting inspector Graham Martin

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Saughall Road
School category	Community		Blacon, Chester
Age range of pupils	4–11		Cheshire CH1 5EZ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01244 390048
Number on roll (school)	228	Fax number	01244370277
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Ms Carol Jones
		Headteacher	Mrs Michelle Ashfield
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected		

Age group 4–11	Inspection dates 11–12 September 2006	Inspection number 294209
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This new school opened in September 2005 following the closure of an infant and junior school. It is an amalgamation of these two schools. Some staff transferred from each of these schools but the headteacher and her deputy were among 13 new staff appointed from outside to start at the time the school opened. The school serves an area that is in the 20% most socially and economically deprived nationally. It is a popular school with a waiting list for admission to the Reception class. It has very close links with a Sure Start Children's Centre, opened recently in the former junior school building, and enjoys an active partnership with other schools as part of Blacon Education Village. The school has gained a 'Tasty Tuck' award from Halton NHS Trust and has already been awarded Healthy School status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Outstanding leadership by the headteacher and her deputy has got this new school off to a flying start in its first year. Its rapid development into an effective school that provides a good education for its pupils is helped by good staff teamwork and shared commitment to the learning and well-being of each pupil. Parents praise the positive start made to provide good learning opportunities for their children that help them to do well. Confidence in the school is strong and it provides good value for money.

Teaching and learning are good, enabling pupils to achieve well. The inspection of pupils' work shows that from a low starting point on entry to the Reception class, children achieve well to reach broadly average standards by the end of Year 6. In the best lessons, good teamwork between teachers and their assistants ensures that pupils work well towards their learning targets. In some lessons, these targets are not fully understood by pupils because marking does not give them good enough guidance.

A good range of learning opportunities provides a broad, balanced and lively curriculum to keep pupils interested. This shows in their enjoyment of school and the conscientious way they learn. In these early days there is more to be done to improve resources to provide good outdoor learning opportunities for the Reception children. Strong partnerships with the new Children's Centre and other local schools are already helping the school to deal with this.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. The school's strong commitment to developing the whole child, both socially and academically, creates a good climate for learning. Pupils flourish here. They behave well and enjoy positive relationships with each other and the adults who help them. The school cares for its pupils well: they are safe and learn how to recognise risks to their personal safety. They enjoy eating healthy food and taking exercise to develop their physical fitness. Pupils trust their teachers. This is reflected in their comments such as, 'we are given good advice and support if we have any problems or if we find learning hard.'

The rapid progress made in setting up school policies and systems for self-evaluation since the school opened reflects the strong commitment to success expressed by staff, parents, governors and the wider community. This stems from the outstanding leadership shown by the headteacher and her deputy and the overall good leadership from staff at all levels. There is a clear commitment to furthering the leadership skills of middle leaders and subject coordinators. The good outcomes for pupils match the effectiveness of the provision that has already been put into place. This is a school with outstanding features in its good capacity to improve, including effective systems for checking and improving teaching, learning and the leadership skills of all staff.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that marking gives pupils clear guidance on how to improve their work.
- Improve resources to provide better outdoor learning opportunities for children in the Reception class.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

From a low start on entry to the Reception class, pupils achieve well and reach broadly average standards by the end of Year 6. Achievement in reading, writing, mathematics and science is good. In Years 2 and 6, pupils' work shows that standards are similar to the national averages at the end of the two key stages. Inspection of pupils' work in Years 1 to 6 confirms teachers' assessments and the results of tests, showing that achievement for all pupils is equally good. Realistic but challenging targets are set. The results in 2006 tests and assessments show that, other than in Year 6 science, these targets were met in Years 2 and 6. The school takes good action to improve standards, responding effectively if there are any indications of lower than expected attainment, such as that seen in the Year 6 2006 science tests.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils co-operate with and care for each other well. They actively ensure that everyone is safe and happy. They show positive attitudes in the way they respond maturely to adult guidance and behave well. At playtimes, trained 'buddies' help organise equipment and games, providing support for other children should any problems occur. The school council gives pupils a voice in making decisions: they agree that their views are taken seriously. Events to raise funds for charitable causes develop social responsibility well. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, fostered well through religious education and interesting daily assemblies. The school's success in gaining the Healthy Schools award shows its good work to secure pupils' understanding of healthy lifestyles and how to keep safe. Pupils' positive attitudes to their physical well-being stem from the good opportunities for physical education and sports during and after school. Parents praise the school's healthy eating policy, saying that their children do make healthy lifestyle choices. Attendance is satisfactory, with positive steps bringing about improvement.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. The quality of teaching seen during the inspection ranged from satisfactory to outstanding. In the good and outstanding lessons, teachers meet the needs of their pupils very well by planning lessons closely matched to previous learning. Different levels of challenge help all pupils including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to achieve as well as they should. Teachers and teaching assistants form very effective partnerships to help pupils to learn well. However, in some lessons, pupils do not fully understand their targets because marking of their work has not given them enough guidance. Although expectations of pupils' learning

are consistently good across the school, occasionally in lessons the amount of learning expected is too demanding for some pupils who are not sure how to meet their learning targets. Good and outstanding lessons draw on the direct experience of teachers and pupils. This makes them even more relevant and interesting. Pupils then see a clear purpose to their learning, their enjoyment is increased and they learn very well.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Pupils benefit from a good, broad and balanced curriculum. It takes careful account of the pupils' learning needs and interests. Pupils with particular needs are catered for well through extra support in class and individual support from specialist staff. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities therefore have full access to the curriculum, learn well and make good progress. Resources in the Reception class do not yet provide sufficient opportunities for learning outdoors. Activities are planned for enjoyment and interest and pupils really do enjoy their lessons. An impressive range of enrichment activities adds to pupils' development. Extra opportunities for sport and art and French language lessons appeal to pupils' interests, adding value to their learning. An exciting programme of visits and visitors to school, including residential trips for pupils from Year 2 upwards, extends their experience of the wider world, adding interest and meaning to their work in class. Parents particularly appreciate the learning their children gain from the good range of cultural visits provided.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school takes appropriate measures to ensure that all pupils are well cared for. Procedures for child protection, health and safety, vetting arrangements for new staff and site security are all in place. All pupils receive good guidance, including those who are vulnerable and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This guidance gives them the emotional security they need to make good progress. Parents agree that communication about their children's needs is good and they trust that their children are well cared for. The school's supportive ethos makes the pupils feel happy and secure and this, together with the attractive new school environment, creates a positive climate for learning. Progress is carefully tracked and group targets are used well to guide pupils towards higher achievement and standards. Work on setting individual targets is not yet fully in place. While marking is conscientious and encouraging, it doesn't always tell pupils enough about how they can achieve a particular target.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. In setting up a good school in a short time the headteacher and her deputy show outstanding qualities of commitment, dedication and management. Their strong leadership has established very effective routines for

day-to-day management and has formed a settled, dedicated staff team. The checking of teaching and learning is good and school records show improvements in teaching over the year. Subject and key stage leaders have received extensive training and have made a good start on checking and evaluating provision. The long term outlook for the school is good because staff, governors, parents and pupils work together to make their school a success. This gives the school a positive ethos and a good climate for learning, seen in the pupils' great enjoyment of school and all it offers. Resources are used well to ensure that there is a strong focus on improving learning and raising standards. Well established links with other schools and consultants enable staff to further their skills and put their experience to good use. Effective systems are in place for checking the school's performance, improving teaching and learning and developing the leadership qualities of subject coordinators further, giving the school outstanding features in its capacity to improve, which is good overall.

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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?	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	NA

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	2
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	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.

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

I was very pleased to meet you all during my recent visit to The Arches Primary School. First of all, I must say how impressed I was with how well behaved and polite you all were and how honest you were when you told me your opinions about your school.

There are many good things to be proud of at your school. Here are some that I liked the most.

- It is hard to believe this is a new school because everything runs so well! I know that you have your headteacher and deputy headteacher to thank for the hard work they have done to get your school off to a flying start!
- I am pleased to see how much you like learning. This is because your teachers care that you do the best you can and give you interesting activities.
- I like how much you and the adults trust each other. I saw this in the way that you enjoy being responsible for your school and suggesting ideas to make it even better.
- I am impressed with how well you care for yourselves and each other. You know which foods keep you healthy and lots of ways to keep yourselves safe from harm.

This is what I have asked your school to do now so that it will be even better.

- Some of you were not sure how to improve your work because you didn't understand what the teachers' marking told you to do. I have asked the teachers to help you by making their comments more useful for you. You can help by explaining what sort of marking helps you best.
- I am sure that some of you would love to suggest ideas for an exciting outdoor learning area that the Reception class children could enjoy using to help them learn even better.

You probably guessed that I enjoyed my two days in your school.