

Rawtenstall Balladen Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119280
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	295416
Inspection dates	22–23 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Sonja Oyen HMI

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	153
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Nick Pilling
Headteacher	Mr Peter Sumner
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2006
School address	Linden Lea Rawtenstall Rossendale Lancashire BB4 6DX
Telephone number	01706 215233
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Balladen is smaller than most primary schools and the number of pupils in each of the seven classes varies from 17 to 26. Most of the pupils come from an estate of rented homes in an area of social and economic deprivation. Almost 40% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, well above the national average. Very nearly all pupils are of White British heritage. The number of pupils who have English as an additional language is very low. Almost one in three pupils has been identified as having a learning difficulty and/or disability which is higher than in most schools. Seven pupils have a statement of special educational need. On entry to the Reception class, the knowledge, skills and experience of most children is slightly lower than expected for their age, especially in their ability to get on with others.

The school was inspected in February 2006 and judged to require a Notice to Improve. At that time, the deputy headteacher was the acting headteacher. He was appointed substantive headteacher in February 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

In accordance with Section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

Balladen is now a good school with several outstanding features. Virtually every aspect of the school's work has improved since the inspection in early 2006 when pupils' achievement and leadership and management were judged inadequate. The headteacher, appointed in February 2007 after a period as acting headteacher, has been the driving force in raising expectations and in seizing every opportunity, whether it be as a reading buddy or sledging when the snow comes, to make learning fun for the pupils and to inspire pupils and staff to do their best. He has the full backing of governors, staff, pupils and parents who recognise that Balladen, as two parents put it, 'has come on leaps and bounds' and 'is going from strength to strength'. The tight-knit team of teaching and support staff show tremendous enthusiasm and commitment to making things better. All have acted readily on advice. Governors and senior managers have acquired new areas of expertise, particularly in deciding how well the school is doing and in taking effective action to raise the quality. As a result, school improvement has been good and Balladen is now very well placed to sustain the gains made and to build further on its success.

Pupils really enjoy coming to school and staff also enjoy working there. Balladen is a warm, welcoming place where every pupil and adult is valued. The school is vibrant with displays of pupils' work and the celebration of their achievements. Parents rightly praised the staff's care for their children; the way the school fosters the pupils' self-esteem is second to none. There are strong bonds between adults and pupils. A large part is due to the unassuming yet highly effective work of the learning mentor and the support assistants who help pupils with particular needs to succeed by preparing materials for individuals, organising activities and being on hand at key times. Pupils' personal development is outstanding. Pupils are polite, respectful, willing to work together and genuinely pleased when praised. Their behaviour is impeccable. The school's recent success in gaining the Healthy School award was understandable given the way the pupils follow a healthy diet – the new salad bar is a resounding success – and in their enthusiasm for playing team games, using ropes, bats and balls and trying different sports. School councillors play a vital part in raising issues about school life, and pupils are gaining an increasing awareness of business enterprise through making and selling goods at school sales.

Standards are broadly average but rising because good, purposeful teaching is leading to good progress for all year groups. Pupils are starting to achieve well and to show what they can do. The really good start in the Reception class sets the tone. These children make particularly good progress; a good proportion is reading and writing independently and all have made huge steps in their ability to get on with others. The teacher's good use of practical activities, indoors and out, her clear explanation of what the children have to do, and the small steps to get there, all ensure that they learn well. This is also the key to the good learning in other classes. However, the focus on helping pupils to catch up has meant that some pupils, especially in the infant years, have not met their full potential, although they have moved on. In 2006, the steps to boost the Year 6 pupils' learning were very effective. The results in the national tests were the best in the last four years and the school's conviction that this year's results will be even better is well founded. The Year 6 pupils are generally working at the level expected for their age and some are doing better. This also typifies the performance of pupils in Year 2 and other classes.

Teachers are setting targets for pupils and tracking their progress regularly. While all give pupils helpful feedback on how well they are doing, inconsistency in practice, especially in marking, means pupils do not always have a clear picture of exactly what to do to make their work better.

School leadership and management are now good with some outstanding features.

There has been remarkable improvement in governance, strategic management and school leadership at all levels. The strong partnership of headteacher and assistant headteacher is proving a valuable asset; both have an accurate picture of the school's current performance and a sound understanding of what needs to be done to keep up the momentum of improvement. They, and other subject leaders, have their sights set on raising standards further. Governors are weighing up what is best for Balladen. The school development plan has been a useful working tool to steer action in the current school year. However, the lack of specified benefits for the pupils makes it difficult for subject managers, senior managers and governors to assess critically the impact and effectiveness of the action taken.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the planned actions for school improvement are linked to specific outcomes for pupils.
- Refine the assessment of the pupils' performance, the use of marking and the setting of targets to ensure pupils know exactly what they need to do to improve.
- Accelerate the progress of the more able infant pupils to ensure all achieve as well as they can.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' achievement is good overall, although not consistent in all year groups or for all pupils. Various elements, including programmes to help pupils catch up in reading and support for individuals with particular learning needs, are boosting pupils' achievement. There is a tangible expectation that all pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, will meet their targets and the teaching is structured to help the pupils to do so. The school's data from tracking the pupils' performance show that in all year groups, the majority of pupils have met or exceeded their targets in reading, writing and mathematics. In writing, some junior pupils have made the equivalent of a year's progress in two terms. Although infant pupils have moved on, not all have fulfilled the potential shown at the start of the year. Nevertheless, a good measure of the school's growing effectiveness is that all pupils in Year 2 have reached the level expected for their age in reading and mathematics. This represents good achievement; most started in the Reception class with little knowledge of sounds and number. In 2006, the value added by the school to the performance of the Year 6 pupils over their time in the junior years, placed Balladen in the top 5% of all schools. This was a tremendous fillip. The good progress of the current Year 6 pupils rightly led the school to raise its expectations of their performance in the 2007 national tests. The targets are challenging given that a fair number of pupils hover around the level expected for their age, especially in writing. Nonetheless, standards are higher than they were and rising.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils thrive at Balladen in the warm, harmonious atmosphere and the excellent provision for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. From starting in the Reception class, pupils want to be at school. Attendance has risen to about the national average and parents commented on how their children 'bring school home with them'. Pupils are very ready to learn. At all times, they were very polite, friendly, respectful and behaved extremely well. Pupils of different ages played together and were sensible as they moved around school, no mean feat given the steps and slopes. They said they would go to any of the adults in school if they had a problem but rarely needed to. The strong relationships between pupils and adults breed confidence and pupils know their views matter. School councillors compiled a question for the interviews for the new headteacher and pupils instigated the labels to remind people to switch off plugs and only half fill water bottles to save resources. They willingly take on responsibilities; they have worked hard to prepare the school vegetable plot and to set up the woodland trail. One junior pupil quietly read with her infant buddy during the lunchtime. Pupils suggest other pupils and staff to be listed in the Book of Excellence, and are proud to have their work displayed and reported in the local newspaper. They were excited to be meeting up again with pupils from another school where most are from a different cultural heritage.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is now good for all year groups, although it is particularly strong for the youngest and the oldest pupils. The teachers and teaching assistants make effective teams; all use praise and encouragement skilfully to keep the pupils' attention and to acknowledge when pupils are behaving well and doing good work. As a result, pupils stay on task and try their best. The teachers' good subject knowledge and their reflection on how well pupils did in one lesson before planning the next, has ensured the focus is exactly on what pupils need to learn and how they might best learn it. Learning is fun because the teachers use different activities, such as hot seating and pupils working together on small whiteboards. In all classes, there is a strong climate of 'can do' because the teachers match the work to the pupils' abilities and make clear what will count as success. They repeat the steps involved and review with the pupils what they have done but at such times, and when marking the pupils' work, they are not always specific enough in identifying where pupils have missed the target or what they need to do to make their work better. As a result, some pupils do not rectify poor habits such as using i rather than I.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The very good provision in the Reception class is spreading through the school with a growing emphasis on practical activities, especially in mathematics and science, and a widening of the range of opportunities for children to decide what they wish to do. This has enriched and strengthened the quality of the curriculum. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 now have time to enjoy the outdoor classroom whatever the weather; pupils at Key Stage 2 are learning French and all have many chances to learn new skills and try out ideas in the vast range of lunchtime and after

school clubs, which include golf, karate, guitar and the school website. Themes, such as Doctor Who, are used well to link different subjects and to integrate visits, visitors and events.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides a very high level of pastoral care. Required safeguarding procedures are in place; all parents who returned the questionnaire agreed that the school takes good care of their children. Many pupils take advantage of the breakfast club run by the learning mentor. She has been effective in working with families to improve attendance and, along with other support staff, helps those pupils who have personal problems and those who find it hard to manage their emotions. All the staff know every pupil and the ongoing friendly repartee as well as giving of rewards creates a very encouraging, family feel to the school. Teaching and support assistants take their roles responsibly; one commented that working with the pupils is 'the bee's knees'. This has ensured that vulnerable pupils, and those with specific needs, including learning to speak and understand English, are well supported and do well. The sharing of targets with the pupils and their parents has strengthened the quality of academic care, guidance and support. Targets are prominently displayed and pupils' progress is tracked carefully. The Reception class teacher makes very effective use of observations to record what children can do. Nevertheless, there is some way to go to ensure all teachers are secure in assessing pupils' performance accurately and are equally adept in pinpointing what pupils need to do to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher's enthusiasm shines through with his high level of commitment and wish for the school to offer the best. He has encouraged others to take on aspects that match their skills and expertise and, as a result, all staff feel empowered, consulted and valued. Teaching and support staff have made the most of practical advice from local authority personnel to improve the quality of provision and, similarly, governors and senior managers have benefited from guidance in how to look critically at the school's performance. The school's self-evaluation accurately identified where its strengths and areas for development lie. Governors are rightly posing questions about how well the school is doing and how its resources should be used. The bursar has ensured prudent spending decisions to enable support for individual pupils and the employment of a technician to keep the school's computer network in full operation. By acting as the key person in managing the initial stages of establishing the Children's Centre at the school, the bursar has also enabled the headteacher to focus on carrying out the action plan to raise standards. Governors, headteacher and subject leaders have listed relevant priorities for the next year and are now well placed to identify how their planned action will benefit the pupils.

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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	1
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	1

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	1
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

24 May 2007

Dear pupils

Inspection of Rawtenstall Balladen C P School, Lancashire, BB4 6DX

Thank you for making me and Mrs Havard so welcome when we came to see how well you have been learning since inspectors visited last year and found some things needed to improve. Mr Sumner and all the staff have been very clever in making changes so that Balladen is now a good school and getting better day by day!

These are some of things that make Balladen a good school.

- You and your parents told us that you enjoy school because of the fun things you do. Judging by the photographs, Mr Sumner seems willing to join in!
- Balladen is a really friendly place because you are polite, well behaved and willing to help others. We saw you care about eating healthy foods and saving water.
- Your teachers make lessons interesting and help you learn by breaking things down into little steps.
- Mr Sumner is doing a great job as headteacher, with Miss Hudson's help, to organise things to make sure that each one of you can do your very best.
- All the staff are working hard to help you to meet your targets. You have all learnt a lot this year. Year 6 have aimed really high! Well done Year 2 too!
- The children in the Reception class get off to a really good start because there are so many interesting things to do inside and out.

I have asked Mr Sumner, the governors and your teachers to do the following things to make Balladen even better and to help you do even better too.

- Make sure that they know how everything they plan to do will benefit you. You can help with your ideas about what will make things better for you.
- Make it clear to you what you need to do to improve your work. I'm sure you can tell your teachers when you are unsure what to do.
- Help you more able pupils to do the very best you can. You can play your part by telling the teachers when the work is too easy – or too hard!

I am sure that with your help, Balladen will continue to get better.

Mrs Sonja Øyen

Her Majesty's Inspector