



# Nicol Mere School

## Inspection Report

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**Unique Reference Number** 106430  
**Local Authority** Wigan  
**Inspection number** 300483  
**Inspection dates** 21–22 February 2007  
**Reporting inspector** Mark Williams HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary	<b>School address</b>	Roman Road
<b>School category</b>	Community		Ashton-in-Makerfield, Wigan
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11		Lancashire WN4 8DF
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01942 720 871
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	327	<b>Fax number</b>	01942 274 320
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Mr W Morris
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Paul Gubbins
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	25 January 2006		

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<b>Age group</b> 4–11	<b>Inspection dates</b> 21–22 February 2007	<b>Inspection number</b> 300483
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## Introduction

Nicol Mere Primary School was last inspected in January 2006, when it was served with a notice to improve. This was because of significant concerns relating to rates of pupils' progress in Years 3 to 6, the quality of teaching and learning and aspects of leadership and management.

The February 2006 inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Nicol Mere is a larger than average primary school. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is broadly average as is the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Nearly all pupils are of White British heritage. Pupils enter the school with levels of attainment broadly in line with that found nationally, although this has been variable in recent years.

For two years prior to September 2006 the school experienced significant disruption to staffing, including several changes in leadership. A new headteacher took up post in September 2006.

The school has gained the Leading Aspect Award for the work it does in promoting pupils' social and emotional health and well-being.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

In accordance with Section 13 (5) of the Education Act of 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. Under the good, strong leadership of the former acting headteacher (now the deputy headteacher) and the new headteacher, the school has made significant progress and now provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. Self-evaluation is good and results in well-judged assessments of the school's work. The school now offers satisfactory value for money.

Determined and focused actions by school leaders since the last inspection have led to pupils in Years 3 to 6 making better progress in their learning. Sharper, more rigorous assessments provide the school with better quality and more accurate information than it did previously about what pupils can or cannot do. This information is used to plan appropriate challenge to the more able and provide support for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. As a result, the quality of teaching has improved and is now satisfactory with some good features. This improvement is also a result of a systematic programme of monitoring, support and professional development that has seen teachers place learners at the heart of all they do. Nonetheless, small pockets of underachievement still exist and, despite now making satisfactory progress, boys achieve less well than girls. Also, there are still inconsistencies in teaching. Some, for example, relies too heavily on worksheets or copying which stifles some pupils' ability to think or work things out for themselves.

In the last inspection, weaknesses were identified in leadership and management. These have been resolved. The headteacher and deputy headteacher demonstrate a clear commitment to raising levels of pupil progress and improving the quality of teaching. They lead by example. Together with the governing body, who hold the school to account, they provide good, strong leadership. Subject leaders now have an enhanced role in the life of the school. They have begun to get a grip of what standards, pupils' progress and areas for development are in their areas of responsibility. All members of the school community are held accountable. This new climate, reflected in one pupil's suggestion that the new school motto should be, 'The day I try is the day I succeed' is appreciated by pupils and the vast majority of parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire. The school, however, is not complacent nor is it satisfied to rest on its success so far. It appreciates that many of the correct and necessary improvement measures introduced are only just beginning to impact positively on pupils' progress. As a result, the school's capacity to improve, although promising, is judged at this stage to be satisfactory.

In the inspection of January 2006 specific areas for improvement were highlighted. The school rightly focused on these. Other aspects of the school's work, however, have not been neglected. The satisfactory conditions of the curriculum and other activities, and the quality of care, guidance and support have been maintained. Provision in the Foundation Stage remains good. Impressively, pupils' personal development and well-being have been improved and are now good. Particularly good work has ensured concerns about behaviour raised in the last inspection have been dealt with effectively.

## What the school should do to improve further

Building upon the improvements made already, the school should:

- eradicate the small pockets of underachievement that still exist
- raise levels of boys' attainment to that of girls
- ensure consistency in the quality of teaching so that more is judged to be good and it allows pupils to work things out for themselves.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 3

Achievement and standards, judged to be inadequate in January 2006, are now satisfactory.

Pupils enter the school with broadly average levels of attainment and leave with standards broadly in line with the national average. This represents satisfactory progress, although in recent years the rate of progress has slowed in Years 3 to 6. The school has taken effective steps to improve this. The majority of pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those who are more able, now make satisfactory, and in some cases good progress. However, small pockets of underachievement still exist, particularly in mathematics and science, and boys, although making satisfactory progress, achieve less well than girls. The school is aware of these issues and has in place a number of increasingly effective programmes of support led by teachers and teaching assistants.

Pupils continue to make good progress in the Foundation Stage and in Years 1 and 2. Sharper and more rigorous assessments here and across the school now give clearer and more accurate information about what pupils can or cannot do. As a result, the quality of teaching, especially in Years 3 to 6, has improved thereby enhancing rates of pupils' progress.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good and have improved since the previous inspection. Pupils' behaviour is now good. As a result they show positive attitudes to learning. Pupils concentrate and engage in activities both in class and in extra-curricular activities. They say that, 'School makes us happy' and 'Teachers do impressions of the characters in books. They make learning fun.' Such comments are typical of pupils' views.

Pupils' attendance is satisfactory and improving. Pupils report that they feel safe and know who to turn to if they are troubled. Their spiritual, moral and social development is good and improved since the last inspection. For example, pupils know the school prayers by heart and say them with meaning. Year 6 pupils' joint recitation of 'If I Can Do Some Good Today' in a class assembly was both moving and inspirational. The school has gained the Leading Aspect Award for the good work it does in promoting

pupils' social and emotional health and well-being. Its success is reflected in the care and respect pupils show towards themselves and others. However, pupils' awareness of the multi-cultural nature of society is not as strong or as well embedded as other areas.

Pupils take on a number of responsibilities, for example, through the successful school council. They also help and support each other through acting as 'buddies' and play-leaders. When pupils are given more responsibility in lessons they learn more and make better progress. Their improved progress in literacy and numeracy means they are being satisfactorily prepared in the skills they need for later life and their future economic well-being.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

Teaching is now satisfactory with some good features. The result of this improvement since the last inspection is that the majority of pupils make satisfactory and, in some cases, good progress in their learning.

Typically teachers plan work that is appropriate to the needs of pupils. They make effective use of clearer and more accurate assessments of what pupils can or cannot do. Where pupils require additional challenge or support this is provided. In the best lessons, effective use is made of information and communication technology (ICT). Teachers' skilful questioning, deployment of teaching assistants and the provision of opportunities for pupils to think and work things out for themselves also ensure progress in these lessons is good. These strong aspects, however, are not always consistent features across the school, particularly in Years 3 to 6. Marking is not always consistent. Nonetheless, the headteacher's and deputy headteacher's clear focus on improving the quality of teaching has paid dividends. No lessons observed were less than satisfactory.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 3**

The curriculum is satisfactory and meets the needs of pupils.

National guidance is now used satisfactorily to ensure that previous learning is built on. School leaders have ensured adequate teaching time is now allowed for all subjects, particularly science. ICT is used well to support learning in literacy and numeracy. However, the overdependence on worksheets and pupils copying from text limits the opportunities they have to work things out for themselves and in some classes, for example, use their writing skills across the curriculum.

The provision for pupils' personal development is good. This contributes effectively to their understanding of citizenship, being healthy and staying safe. The curriculum in the Foundation Stage is good. Outdoor provision has been improved through the

building of an attractive garden area, playground markings and the purchase of a range of wheeled toys to extend children's learning experiences. Educational visits, for example to Tatton Park, residential visits and visitors to the school enrich the curriculum and are appreciated by pupils and parents alike. Pupils also talk enthusiastically about the good range of extra-curricular activities, including lunchtime and after school clubs, available to them.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 3**

Overall, care, guidance and support of pupils are satisfactory and include some good features. For example, the school's care for its pupils has a positive impact on their personal development. Strategies to improve pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning have worked well. The emphasis on pupils' academic progress is developing. Although there have been improvements in the assessment of pupils' work, the school is aware there are still some pupils who are not aware of how they can improve it.

The school arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils are appropriate and health and safety advice is followed. Pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are given effective support through a thoughtful programme of targeted help.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

Leadership and management overall are satisfactory and improving.

The school has in recent years experienced significant changes in leadership. The current headteacher is the fourth headteacher in just under two years. He has made a good start, building on the good work of his deputy headteacher in her time as acting headteacher. Together, they have tackled previous weaknesses head on. Although the full impact of the many necessary measures to secure improvement are only beginning to bed down, the healthy improvements in pupils' rates of progress and in the quality of teaching, especially in Years 3 to 6, have ensured the school has a renewed sense of hope and optimism. The previously mentioned pupil's suggested motto of 'The day I try is the day I succeed' is not an aspiration but a reality.

The headteacher and deputy headteacher, along with the governing body who hold the school to account with increased determination, do not expect to do everything themselves. With good support from the local authority, they have invested effectively in the professional development of adults who work in the school. Leadership and management are devolved increasingly effectively throughout the school. Subject leaders, for example, are now held more accountable for rates of pupils' progress and the quality of teaching in their areas of responsibility. The school acknowledges this work is still in its early stages. The leadership of both the headteacher and deputy headteacher is good and that of subject leaders is developing. At this stage the school has a satisfactory but promising capacity to make further improvement.

Financial management is sound. The school's accurate evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses informs its future priorities well. Parents responding to the inspection questionnaire are very appreciative of the improvements made.

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## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	3
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	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3
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

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	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	3
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

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	3
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	3
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	3

<sup>1</sup> 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

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	2
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	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**

Thank you very much indeed for your welcome when Mrs Cordey, Mrs Davenport and I visited your school. You were very polite and well behaved.

We were pleased to hear how much you enjoy school and how you think Nicol Mere has improved. We agree with you: Nicol Mere has improved and now provides you with a satisfactory education. Nearly all of you are making better progress in your learning. We particularly liked listening to Year 6 children read their letters of complaint to Mrs Wolf. We also liked the way you help other children, for example, by being play-leaders and working with the school council. You are certainly growing up to be good citizens.

We know you all want to get better. We have therefore asked your headteacher and deputy headteacher to make sure the few of you who are not making enough progress begin to do so soon. We have noticed that girls tend to do better than boys. We and your school believe you can all do as well as each other. We have also asked that all the lessons in school are as good as the best.

So, why has your school improved since the last inspection? Well, we know the whole Nicol Mere community has tried very hard. We also know that your headteacher and deputy headteacher have worked very hard indeed. They now know exactly what is good in your school and what needs to get better. We are sure you will help them too!