

Yew Tree Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103974
Local Authority	Sandwell
Inspection number	301056
Inspection dates	19–20 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Susan Morris-King 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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	480
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Dearden
Headteacher	Howard Martin
Date of previous school inspection	24 March 2003
School address	Birchfield Way Yew Tree Estate Walsall WS5 4DX
Telephone number	01922 626926
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Yew Tree Primary School expanded significantly in September 2006 when it enrolled the pupils from the former Fir Tree school, a school in special measures which the Local Authority (LA) closed in July 2006. This more than doubled the size of the school. The Fir Tree school site became the 'Greenside' site of Yew Tree School and the former Fir Tree pupils have remained on this site. The vast majority of the original Yew Tree pupils are based on the 'Birchfield' site. Since September a few pupils have changed classes and swapped sites. Ten new teachers and a large number of new support staff joined the school in September 2006. The two sites are about half a mile apart. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is higher than the national average. When pupils join the school in the Foundation Stage their overall skill levels are lower than expected for their age. There are fewer pupils than average from minority ethnic groups and only a small proportion speaks English as an additional language.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Yew Tree Primary is a good school. Through his inspirational leadership, the headteacher has built on the strengths of the original Yew Tree School to create a cohesive and harmonious community which is greatly appreciated by pupils and by parents. He has been ably assisted by the very effective deputy headteacher and the other members of the leadership team. The significant expansion of the school has been very sensitively managed. Despite the considerable constraints of working across two sites, staff work closely together and exemplify the ethos which the headteacher has set out to create. As a result, pupils and staff on each of the sites feel strongly that they are equally highly valued. Relationships with parents are good. Parents are welcomed into the school on both sites, both informally and through a series of workshops for example, one which helps them to support their children to prepare for their National Curriculum assessments, and another to develop 'positive parenting'. In turn, parents support the school through an active Parent Teacher Association. The learning environment on both sites is exceptional because of the hard and creative work of all the staff, including the site managers. A wide range of artefacts stimulates pupils' imaginations and their own work is carefully displayed alongside them. Expectations are high. The many new staff, together with the established staff, have been very well supported by senior leaders in developing and refining their teaching skills. Teaching is good overall, with some that is outstanding. There is a clear focus on achievement, assessment is thorough and progress is rigorously tracked. Lessons are well planned and interesting. As a result, pupils are making good progress. Standards are slightly below average overall, although there is some variation between the two sites. Standards are slightly above average on the Birchfield site by the end of Key Stage 2. On the Greenside site, because of a legacy of underachievement, standards are below average by the end of Key Stage 2, but they are rising fast. There are also some variations between classes and subjects, which the school is aware of and is rightly determined to even out. Provision for pupils in the Foundation Stage is well led and managed. A welcoming and exciting learning environment coupled with good teaching enables children to make good progress in all areas of learning. The pupils' personal development and well-being are good. The emphasis on being a 'Yew Tree Kid', which is exemplified in photographs and text throughout the school, helps pupils to understand the school's well-defined values. Pupils have very good relationships with each other and with staff. Pupils are exceptionally enthusiastic about their experiences. They behave well, they are confident, and they are able to explain clearly what the school does to help them to feel safe and secure and to help them to learn. All pupils are well cared for and are given good quality support and guidance to help them to improve their work. When pupils need additional help, a range of effective support is provided. The 'Glade' class provides a highly nurturing environment in which pupils who need some extra care thrive. The curriculum is satisfactory, with some notable strengths. An appropriate focus on literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) has helped to improve pupils' basic skills. After a successful year of leading the expanded school, the headteacher and leadership team have rightly begun to review the curriculum with the intention of expanding opportunities for pupils and focusing more on developing pupils' creativity and their learning skills. The enrichment and extracurricular opportunities for pupils are very good. Pupils make the most of them and this enhances their personal development. One notable example is the range of residential visits which is offered to pupils from Year 2 onwards. The extensive improvement which the school has secured since its expansion, together with the rigorous evaluation of its current performance, demonstrates an outstanding capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further improve achievement and standards so they are more even across all subjects and all year groups.
- Implement the sensible plans to improve the curriculum.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are slightly below average overall but pupils are making good progress. There is a legacy of underachievement on the Greenside site. Standards at the former school were below average at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 over several years and remain so. On the Birchfield site, standards by the end of Key Stage 2 have risen over the past three years and attainment in the 2006 tests at the end of the key stage was slightly above average. The high expectations and the good teaching all pupils have been experiencing since September 2006 have enabled pupils on both sites in all key stages to reach challenging targets. As a result, standards are rising fast on the Greenside site and have been maintained well on the Birchfield site. There is some unevenness in the progress made in different subjects in some classes in Key Stages 1 and 2, for example, overall progress in writing over the past year has been better than that in reading. However, the school's rigorous tracking system indicates that no group of pupils is underachieving. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. In the Foundation Stage, pupils make good progress in all areas of learning.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school effectively promotes good behaviour and positive attitudes. As a result pupils are well-focused on learning and behave consistently well. Pupils are proud of their school and are extremely positive about the ways it has improved recently. They really enjoy school, particularly the many good opportunities they have to go on visits and residential experiences which help them to learn new skills and to make new friends on both sites. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and strongly supported by the school's reflective ethos and the excellent learning environment. Pupils think deeply about moral issues and have the confidence to express their feelings about topics such as their own behaviour and that of others. As a result of the school's clear expectations they develop a clear sense of right and wrong. Innovative approaches such as 'peer massage' help pupils to feel calm and to develop good relationships with each other. Pupils know who to approach if they have any concerns and make good use of the 'buddies' and monitors to resolve matters quickly. They make a good contribution to their community. The school council's views are taken seriously and it is becoming increasingly effective in bringing about improvements in the school. Pupils take responsibility for classroom and school-wide jobs and work to raise funds for charities such as Cancer Research. Basic skills are very well developed and enterprise skills have been introduced through activities such as running the tuck shop. This means pupils are well prepared for the future. They have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles and increasingly adopt them. Attendance has risen to close to the national average but it rightly remains a priority for the school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Pupils show a thirst for learning and this is rewarded by enthusiastic teaching. Lessons are often exciting: high expectations, a brisk pace and appropriate levels of challenge are features of the best lessons, motivating all pupils to aim really high, work hard and achieve their best. A clear emphasis on developing pupils' independent learning skills helps pupils to succeed, and the 'thinking hats' approach is well used to help pupils to approach their learning with purpose. In the Foundation Stage the teaching is well balanced between adult-led and child-centred activities across the areas of learning. Planning is generally very good. Close attention is paid to identifying what skills and knowledge different pupils need to gain, although occasionally there is a mismatch and the work is too hard or too easy. The 'pre-learning' homework sheets are used very well to assess pupils' prior knowledge and to enthuse them about what they are about to learn. Assessment information is used well to identify those who are at risk of falling behind and to make sure they have the necessary support. Targets are used well to help raise expectations. Regular self-assessment opportunities enable pupils to review how well they are doing. The work of learning support practitioners (LSPs) is well planned for and is very effective at all key stages. Importantly, the leadership team deploys LSPs according to which pupils have the greatest need at the time. This contributes particularly well to helping children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress and in preventing others from falling behind.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Literacy skills are promoted well across the curriculum and combined with numeracy and ICT provide a secure basis for pupils to make progress. There is an effective emphasis on the development of writing, and provision for reading is being appropriately developed. Better ICT resources and expertise have led to considerable improvement in this provision, particularly in the use of interactive whiteboards in lessons. A good programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education contributes well to pupils' personal development. The school is sensitive to the needs of pupils in mixed-age classes, adopting appropriate strategies to ensure that they receive a suitably challenging and age-appropriate curriculum. Children in the Foundation Stage benefit from a good, stimulating curriculum covering all areas of learning. The careful use of outside areas enables children to learn through discovery and investigation. The leadership team has identified that some lessons do not make enough use of creative approaches, and is aware that the regular additional literacy lessons lead to some degree of imbalance in the curriculum. Sensible plans have been made to improve these aspects. The curriculum is enriched by a wide variety of interesting and stimulating educational visits, such as to the Space Centre and Plas Gwynant Outdoor Centre, and by a very good range of extra-curricular activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school's good care, support and guidance make a significant contribution to pupils' personal development and well-being. There are good procedures to ensure pupils' safety in school at both sites. Thorough risk assessments are carried out when necessary, for example, for

out-of-school visits. Safeguarding procedures are secure and meet current government requirements. All staff are given appropriate child protection training and are well informed about the school's procedures. A good range of strategies is used to support pupils to behave well and to develop good attitudes and high self-esteem, including daily assemblies. The impact of these strategies is also evident in the rapid improvement in pupils' rates of progress and their wider achievements. Good links with a number of external agencies provide intensive support for children and their families, including those who are looked after and those with learning difficulties. The 'Glade' group provides valuable support for a small group of pupils. Procedures to check how well pupils are achieving are very rigorous, and this information is well used to set challenging individual targets. Pupils with learning difficulties have additional targets in their individual education plans which focus on personal needs. Gifted and talented pupils are identified readily and are also set appropriate targets. Teachers' marking makes reference to targets to help pupils know how to improve their work. The school recognises that there is still more work to do to help some pupils and their parents realise the value of regular attendance and time keeping.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher, very well supported by the leadership team, has led and managed the expansion of the school exceptionally well. The large number of new staff who joined in September were quickly enabled to understand the headteacher's high expectations and responded very positively to them. As a result of the hard and creative work carried out by staff during the summer holiday period, the Greenside site was transformed into an excellent learning environment. This was pivotal in beginning to establish the positive ethos for the expanded school, which has since been very well developed. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation by the leadership team enable them to have a very good understanding of the strengths of the school and the areas which need further development. This has had a particularly strong impact on improving teaching and learning. Well-focused training and clear points for development have enabled all teachers to improve their practice. The creative use of ICT has assisted communication between staff on the two sites. Several teachers have recently been leading aspects of the school's work and some of these roles have just been formalised into middle leadership posts, which makes the school well placed to improve leadership even further. The governing body is very loyal. It is well led by the chair and has fully embraced its new responsibilities for the extended school. The chair of governors has expressed clearly to the LA the governing body's desire for a new school building to enable the school to operate effectively on one site. The school has worked closely with, and been well supported by, the LA through the period of transition.

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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?	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	1
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?	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	1
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?	3
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	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

- 21 June 2007 Dear Pupils Inspection of Yew Tree School, Walsall, WS5 4DX/4BW We were really impressed with what we saw and heard when we came to inspect the school this week. Your school has had an unusual year, doubling in size and gaining a whole new site! Thank you for helping us to understand what it is like to be a 'Yew Tree Kid'. You and your parents told us that Yew Tree is a good school, and we agree. There are many good things about Yew Tree. Here are just a few which you were particularly keen for us to notice.
- Your headteacher inspires everybody to feel that Yew Tree is a special place.
- Your lessons are exciting and they motivate you to want to do your very best.
- Because you and your teachers have worked so hard you are making good progress. You get extra help when you need it and this really helps you.
- You have very good opportunities to go on trips and visits, like the Plas Gwynant residential trip, and you do other interesting things in school, such as the 'peer massage'.
- You behave well and take lots of responsibility for helping to make Yew Tree a good school. Your teachers have already decided that you need some more chances to be creative in your lessons – to think for yourselves and to use your original ideas – and we agree with them. We have also asked them to keep trying to make sure that everyone achieves their very best in every class and in every subject. You can help by continuing to work really hard in every lesson and every day. We really enjoyed the two days we spent at your school. Thank you again for your help. Yours sincerely Mrs S Morris-King Her Majesty's Inspector