

Victoria Park Primary

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 103940 |
| Local Authority | Sandwell |
| Inspection number | 302556 |
| Inspection dates | 25–26 June 2007 |
| Reporting inspector | Susan Morris-King HMI |

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 3–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 383 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Darren Cooper |
| Headteacher | Andrew Morrish |
| Date of previous school inspection | 1 November 2005 |
| School address | Ballot Street Smethwick B66 3HH |
| Telephone number | 0121 5588701 |
| Fax number | 0121 5555077 |

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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 (HMI) and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

When Victoria Park Primary School was inspected in November 2005 it was judged to be providing an inadequate standard of education and therefore to require special measures. The school was subsequently visited on three occasions by HMI prior to this inspection to monitor its progress.

A very high proportion of pupils are entitled to free school meals compared to the national average. Eighty seven per cent of pupils are from minority ethnic groups, and over sixty per cent speak English as an additional language, both of which figures are much higher than the national average. A higher than average proportion of pupils has learning difficulties and/or disabilities. When children join the school in the Foundation Stage many have lower skill levels than expected for their age.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Overall effectiveness of the school Grade: 3 In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures. Victoria Park Primary School has undergone a period of significant improvement and is now satisfactory. This has been achieved through the dynamic and decisive leadership of the headteacher supported by the highly effective work of the leadership team, and the continuous hard work of teachers, support staff and pupils. Teaching is satisfactory overall and there is a growing proportion which is good and some that is outstanding. The careful attention paid to literacy and numeracy, the improved structure and pace of lessons, and the exemplary way in which pupils are helped to assess their own learning have led to pupils making greatly improved progress, particularly during the last year. Progress is satisfactory and some groups and individuals have made good progress in several subjects. Because pupils are making much better progress in literacy and numeracy, standards are rising steadily in these subjects. When the school was placed in special measures in November 2005 standards were exceptionally low. Whilst pockets of exceptionally low standards remain, for example in reading in some classes, overall standards are below average which represents a significant improvement.

Provision for the Foundation Stage is satisfactory overall. Children make sound progress across all areas of learning and good progress with their physical development because the provision and teaching for this area is particularly strong. The curriculum is satisfactory and the school has appropriate plans for development. Subject leadership, particularly for the core subjects, has been developed well. Leaders are enthusiastic and have a secure understanding of the next steps which need to be taken. The leadership team's recent analysis of pupils' progress in literacy and numeracy is excellent, which makes the school well placed to continue to raise standards in these subjects. The science curriculum has recently improved and the school has accurately identified that a greater focus on the teaching of science is now needed in order to ensure that pupils' skills and knowledge are fully developed. Pupils have begun to benefit from an increasingly wide and well managed range of additional support to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. Data is used well to identify which pupils need this extra help and how much progress they are making as a result. A significant number of adults are employed by the school in different support roles, such as learning mentors and teaching assistants. Recent training has begun to improve the quality of support in the classroom and for intervention groups, but this remains an area for development. Some pupils who speak English as an additional language receive some small group teaching but the school is aware of the need to improve the way in which these learners are helped to develop their English in all lessons.

Behaviour is good and pupils have positive attitudes to their learning. They respond particularly well to enthusiastic teaching, where the expectations are made clear. Some pupils lack confidence and learn best when they are praised and reassured as well as challenged. Pupils cooperate well with each other. They have greatly benefited from assessing their own and each other's work and, as a result, have begun to understand how to improve their own learning and support each others'. Some of their comments are perceptive and sophisticated. This has also contributed effectively to their personal development and has particularly enhanced their skills of negotiation and listening.

The significant improvements which the school has made since the previous inspection, and particularly in the last year, indicate that the school has a good capacity to improve further.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What the school should do to improve further

- Refine teaching and learning so that it always meets the needs of all pupils in order to raise standards further in all subjects.
- Develop the teaching of science so that all pupils make good progress.
- Improve the teaching of reading in order to raise standards.
- Improve the way in which learners of English as an additional language are helped to develop their English in all their lessons.
- Develop further the roles and skills of teaching assistants.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils are making at least satisfactory progress overall, and some pupils are making good progress in literacy and numeracy. Standards remain below average overall, with pockets that are still exceptionally low but, as a result of much improved progress, standards are rising steadily.

Children in the Foundation Stage make sound progress and by the end of the key stage their attainment is slightly below national expectations. In the area of physical development, children make good progress. The school's rigorous tracking data indicates that in mathematics and writing standards are below national averages across Key Stages 1 and 2. The exception to this is in Year 5 where standards are close to average in these subjects. Standards are weakest in reading and remain exceptionally low overall. However, progress in reading since September 2006 has been at least satisfactory and has been good in several classes, which is beginning to raise standards. Although progress in science is improving, it is less consistent than in literacy and numeracy. Pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities make satisfactory progress overall and some have made good progress during the last year as a result of good quality intervention.

The school has accurately identified that a small number of pupils have not made adequate progress in one or more core subjects. Rigorous action has been taken to address this which has already begun to have some impact.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils enjoy school and are polite, courteous and welcoming to visitors. Relationships between adults and pupils are good. In lessons pupils work well with each other, particularly in small groups or with their partner. Attendance is now at its highest since 2004 and broadly is in line with the national average for primary schools. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. A recent emphasis on pupils' cultural heritage has helped different groups to feel valued. The greater emphasis on taking responsibility, for example through marking each others' work, is helping pupils to become more confident and articulate. Other opportunities for pupils to take responsibility, such as the eco-garden, are just beginning to develop. Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of living a healthy lifestyle and make good efforts to eat healthily and take exercise. Pupils feel safe in school and know how to stay safe, for example they understand the need to report the presence of any unfamiliar

visitors. The school council gives pupils an effective forum to influence important decisions in the school, for example they are pleased to have the chance to plan improvements to the physical education (PE) changing rooms.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Because of the determined approach by senior leaders to driving improvements in teaching, all teachers are aware of effective ways of helping pupils learn, and they have risen to the challenge of raising standards. Some of these effective methods were present in every lesson observed during the inspection and some teachers are consistently using them well, which is having a positive impact on pupils' progress. For example, in all lessons pupils were told what they would learn and had opportunities to reflect on how successful they had been during the lesson. A particularly effective strategy is the use of 'working walls' where teachers have displays of examples and advice for the week's lessons in literacy, numeracy and science. Pupils are frequently asked to explain what they have learnt, what they need to do in the next lesson, and how the teacher can help them, which is an effective use of self assessment. Marking is generally good and there are examples of outstanding practice.

Lessons generally have a reasonable balance between teachers talking and pupils learning actively. Where lessons are not well balanced, pupils lose interest and this hinders their progress. Lessons are least effective when there is too much focus on completing tasks rather than learning, the pace is pedestrian, or the teacher does not retain a sufficient overview of the progress pupils are making.

Teachers have become better at matching tasks to pupils' needs; this is helped by the increased use of assessment to inform planning for the next lesson. Occasionally the work is not challenging enough to really stretch the most able pupils. Pupils' presentation of their work is generally satisfactory but is sometimes lacking precision, particularly in mathematics. There is too much variation between classes in the quality of pupils' handwriting. The school has developed the role of learning support practitioners but their effectiveness in supporting pupils' learning is still too variable.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school has quite rightly focused its curriculum on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. Literacy and numeracy lessons have become a strength of the curriculum provision and the school is now well placed to extend the teaching of these skills into other subjects. Provision for science has improved, with all classes receiving an appropriate amount of teaching time and a better focus on investigational science. Pupils benefit from two PE lessons each week and a growing range of after school sporting activities. The school has recently introduced a new thematic curriculum to help to develop skills across different subjects and to broaden pupils' experiences.

The school is committed to improving the curriculum in the Foundation Stage by developing a child centred, play based approach to learning. An excellent two year strategic development plan for early years is in the first stages of implementation. The Foundation Stage unit has been refurbished and many new resources have been purchased to provide a high quality,

stimulating learning environment. Importantly, the staff have already begun to provide more opportunities for open ended thinking and problem solving.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The behaviour policy is consistently applied throughout the school by all staff, with positive outcomes both inside and outside the classroom. Pupils understand the high expectations set by the school and the consequences of any inappropriate behaviour. There are effective systems to monitor attendance which have had a significant impact. The school is successfully working in partnership with parents to further improve attendance. A policy of 'zero tolerance' towards term time holidays, well supported by the governing body, has successfully reduced the number of requests. Staff are sensitive to pupils' individual circumstances, which are sometimes very complex. Safeguarding procedures are in place and meet current government requirements. The school has improved its provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and support has become better targeted. Some pupils who speak English as an additional language receive some small group teaching but better strategies are needed to help pupils to develop their written and spoken English in all lessons. Academic guidance is a strong feature of the school's work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher and the leadership team have provided driven and focused leadership through a period of rapid improvement. A significant factor in enabling improvement was the development of a highly rigorous assessment and tracking system. Its clarity allows the leadership team to be highly vigilant about the progress of pupils in each class and to take prompt action where necessary. Combined with the half termly interviews which the headteacher holds with each teacher, this has been powerful in helping teachers to understand pupils' progress and their own accountability for it, as well as helping to identify any support which either staff or pupils need. Senior leaders have made the expectations of each lesson very clear and this has had a positive impact on the quality of teaching.

Middle leaders' roles and skills are developing well and they are making a positive contribution to the school's capacity for further improvement. Teachers have responded very positively to the culture of accountability and aspiration and are rising to the challenges which are set for them. New leadership roles for the next academic year have been well thought out and appointments carefully made.

Governance has improved and is satisfactory. The chair has a clear understanding of his role and provides good leadership. Governors are supportive and, as their knowledge increases, they are providing an increasing level of challenge to the school.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

| | |
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| <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? | 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 | 3 |
| 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? | 3 |
| The standards ¹ 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

| | |
|---|---|
| How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 3 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 3 |
| The behaviour of learners | 2 |
| The attendance of learners | 3 |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 3 |
| 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 | 3 |
| 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? | 3 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 3 |

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

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| 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 | 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

27 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Victoria Park Primary School, Smethwick B66 3HH

As you know, I have been visiting your school with some other inspectors every term. This is because your school has been in 'special measures'. It has had some problems and I have been checking to see how much it has been improving. You will be very glad to know that because of the hard work of your headteacher, the staff and all of you, your school has improved a great deal and is now 'out of special measures'. Congratulations! This is a real achievement and you should be very proud.

Thank you for the help you have given us on each visit. You have always made us feel welcome, you are polite, and you are nice to each other as well, which is good to see. I particularly like the way you notice people as they are walking down the corridor and you hold the door open and say 'good morning'.

There are many other positive things about your school now but I am going to mention just one which is particularly special. That is the way in which you mark each other's work. In our report we have said this is 'exemplary' – in other words it is really excellent. You really take this seriously and your comments are very perceptive. This has helped your learning a great deal. Well done for doing this in such a mature and sensible way.

You are now making much better progress with your literacy and numeracy and, because of this, your skills are developing well. We do not need to come back each term any more because your headteacher and the leadership team can carry on making your school even better without us. We have asked them to concentrate on a few things which we think are important.

- Keep helping your teachers to give you better and better lessons so that your work keeps improving in each subject.
- Look at how to make science lessons good in all the classes.
- Improve reading lessons.
- Help those of you who need to practise your English to have lots of chances to do this in all your lessons.
- Think about how all the support staff can help you even more. I wish you every success in the future. Keep working hard!

Yours sincerely

Sue Morris-King Her Majesty's Inspector