

Alder Coppice Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103869
Local Authority	Dudley
Inspection number	308442
Inspection dates	21–22 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Andrew McDowall

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	470
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Neil Gibbons
Headteacher	Duncan Jones
Date of previous school inspection	30 June 2003
School address	The Northway Sedgley Dudley DY3 3PS
Telephone number	01384 816610
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger-than-average-sized school. The great majority of the pupils attending the school come from White British backgrounds. Consequently, the percentages of pupils who are learning English as an additional language or who are from minority ethnic groups are below average. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is well below national average, as is the percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory quality of education. It is popular with parents, who appreciate the good pastoral care it provides for their children. The school is a warm and friendly place where pupils feel safe and enjoy their education. This is illustrated by a parent who said, 'The staff are very approachable and take an interest in the children individually'. The headteacher is providing clear leadership to the school that is improving the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement. Pupils make good gains in their personal development and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

When they start at the school, children have skills and abilities that are well above the levels expected nationally. They get off to a flying start in the Foundation Stage and by the time they move to Year 1 they have reached standards that are well above those expected for children of this age. Pupils make satisfactory progress in Key Stages 1 and 2 as a result of satisfactory teaching, and reach above-average standards. Achievement varies from class to class. The school is taking action to improve this and there is evidence that achievement is now more consistent in the school. However, some higher-attaining pupils do not do as well as they should.

The school relies too heavily on test scores when measuring pupils' progress and some of the teachers' assessments of pupils' levels of ability in Key Stage 1 are inaccurate. These inaccuracies lead to a misleading picture of pupil attainment in the school and reduce the effectiveness of its system for tracking individual pupils' progress. Assessment procedures are inconsistent across the school. As a result, teachers do not always have a clear picture of what each pupil can do. Because of this, teachers sometimes set work that is too easy for the higher-attaining pupils. Some teachers carry out careful analysis of pupils' work to inform their planning, but this is not so in all classes. The marking of pupils' work is satisfactory, but variable in quality. Pupils have a sound understanding of their targets. However, the teachers' marking does not always provide enough information to pupils about whether they have achieved them, or what it is they need to do next to improve.

The school provides an interesting range of extra activities for pupils. These contribute well to pupils' good personal and social development. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and behave well in school. They have a good understanding of how to eat healthily and enjoy the increased opportunities that they have to exercise both in and out of school. Pupils are well supervised and know how to keep themselves safe. They are confident that staff will provide help should they be worried about anything. Pupils make a good contribution to the school and local community and make substantial contributions to a range of charities each year. They have good teamworking skills and are well prepared for their next school and later life.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The senior managers have a secure view of the school's strengths and weaknesses, although inaccurate assessment has resulted in some misconceptions about the progress some pupils are making. At present, too much of the responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school rests with the headteacher. Other senior managers and subject coordinators undertake some school self-evaluation, but they are not involved in assessing the quality of teaching and learning. As a result, they are not fully informed about provision in their areas of responsibility.

The school's capacity to improve is satisfactory. It is not better than satisfactory because subject coordinators are not sufficiently involved in monitoring the work of the school and sometimes

action is not taken quickly enough to address known weaknesses, such as the inaccurate assessment at Key Stage 1.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Many children benefit from good pre-school experience. Consequently, they start school with skills and abilities that are well above the levels expected nationally. The school has good links with pre-school providers and parents. This helps children to settle very quickly into school. Children make good progress in the Foundation Stage, and by the time they move to Year 1 they reach standards that are well above those expected of children of this age. Teaching is good. Staff have high expectations of the children, who respond well to the rich range of activities that are planned for them each day. The outside area is used effectively to support learning, and staff work well together to ensure children feel safe and happy in school. Children are quickly introduced to early reading, but there are limited opportunities for them to write for themselves in the Nursery. Creative development is fostered well through the good range of play opportunities provided by the school. However, some of the creative artwork is too teacher directed and children would benefit from having more opportunities to make choices and explore materials for themselves.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the achievement of the higher-attaining pupils in English and mathematics in Key Stage 1 and 2.
- Improve the accuracy of assessment, and ensure teachers use this information to plan work that is well matched to all abilities and provide pupils with more robust academic guidance to help them improve.
- Improve the effectiveness of subject coordinators in monitoring, evaluating and improving the work of the school.

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 the next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

On starting school, children are confident when speaking to others and have very good social skills. They make good progress during their time in the Foundation Stage. Pupils make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 1 and reach above-average standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 2, where standards are above average in English, mathematics and science. Progress has been slower in Years 3 and 4 in recent years, but actions taken by the school are accelerating progress in these year groups.

The school has recognised that some higher-attaining pupils are not doing as well as they should. This particularly applies to boys in mathematics and girls in writing. However, there are signs that the steps taken by the school are beginning to address this. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those from minority ethnic groups make similar progress to other pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils have well-developed personal and social skills and a strong sense of what is right and wrong. The school takes pupils' views seriously through consultation with the school council and opinion surveys. Systems such as the 'Kindness Zone' enable older pupils to take responsibility for younger ones, or to help others as monitors. Attendance is just above the national average and pupils enjoy their education in a calm and well-ordered environment. There is very little bullying and where problems do occur, pupils say they are resolved rapidly. Healthy lifestyles are promoted well through a strong physical education programme, well-balanced school meals and regular input from the school nurse. Pupils make a range of contributions to the community. These vary from ecological projects to make their school a 'bird friendly' institution to exchanging visits with a local centre for partially sighted adults. They develop teamworking skills well by raising money for charities and organising stalls at the school's bring-and-buy sales.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers and teaching assistants enjoy good relationships with pupils and create positive attitudes to learning in lessons. In almost all lessons, pupils are clear about what they are learning and they work hard. Where pupils make good progress, staff use questions effectively to help them to clarify their thinking, but sometimes questions do not probe deeply enough to extend pupils' learning. Teachers use the interactive whiteboards well to enliven lessons and engage the pupils.

The pace of some lessons is slow and pupils spend too much time sitting on the carpet. A weakness in teaching is the lack of consistency in challenging higher-attaining pupils. As a result, pupils do similar tasks when some are capable of tackling work that is more challenging. Consequently, these pupils say that they sometimes find the work too easy.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The satisfactory curriculum gives a strong emphasis to the development of literacy and numeracy skills. Recent changes have been put in place to ensure subjects are being linked to make topics more meaningful to pupils. Currently, the curriculum does not always offer enough opportunities for pupils to study independently and extend their learning, particularly for those who are higher-attaining. A strength of the curriculum is the creative way in which French has been introduced in Years 3 and 4. The curriculum provides some good opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively, and this makes a good contribution to their personal and social development. Appropriate arrangements are made for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities so they make similar progress to their peers.

Parents appreciate the recent improvements the school has made to the number of extra clubs at lunchtime and after school. The school makes effective use of visitors and visits, including a popular residential experience to extend learning. Links with other schools enhance the curriculum, particularly for those pupils who are gifted and talented, such as when attending mathematics and science master classes at a partner secondary school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The quality of care, guidance and support is satisfactory overall. Appropriate risk assessments are in place for premises and educational visits. Staff are vetted for suitability to work with children and there are adequate arrangements to guarantee child protection. Pupils benefit from a strong school ethos of care and concern where staff know pupils well. This is reflected in the pupils' own view that one of the school's greatest strengths is the friendly relationships between teachers and pupils. Although teachers' personal support of pupils is strong, the quality of the academic guidance is inconsistent across the subjects and across the age range. At times, written work is marked well so that pupils know what they must do in order to improve. Elsewhere, the advice is not consistent or rigorous enough to support improvement. Beyond English and mathematics, there is often little guidance to pupils on how to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher is providing clear direction to the school. He has introduced systems to improve target setting and the way pupils' achievement is assessed over time. This is raising expectations in the school. He has also developed the school's performance management system, which has resulted in some improvements to the quality of teaching. The school is setting challenging targets, but is not always successful in achieving them. This is because the monitoring and evaluation undertaken by staff, other than the headteacher, needs to be more rigorous and followed up to look for evidence of improvement. The governors provide effective support to the school and receive good information from the headteacher on the school's performance. However, their role in monitoring the work of the school is limited.

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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?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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?	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

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
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

Dear Children,

Inspection of Alder Coppice Primary School, Dudley DY3 3PS

I would like to start by saying a big thank you to everyone for making us feel so welcome when we visited your school recently to see your work and talk to the teachers. Yours is a satisfactory school.

Yours is a happy and friendly school where you make satisfactory progress in your work. However, we think that some of you find your work easy and could do better if you were given more difficult tasks to do. We were impressed by your good behaviour and the way you all look after each other in school. You told us you feel safe in school.

Like you, we think the school is providing a good range of clubs for you to join. Your school is good at helping you to grow in confidence and become keen and eager to learn. Thank you for raising so much money for charity each year. I am sure this helps many people.

We have asked the school to do three things to help it improve.

- The first is to help those of you who find work easy to make more progress and reach the higher levels by the time you leave school.
- We have also asked the teachers to improve the way they check how you are doing. We think this will help them to set work that is not too easy or too difficult for you all. We have also asked them to make sure they tell you if you reach your targets, and explain what you need to do to get even better.
- Finally, we have asked your headteacher to make sure more staff are involved in checking how good the teaching is, so it can continue to improve.

You can help by remembering your targets whenever you are doing any work and by checking your work for yourself to see if it is as good as it can be.

Thank you again for being so helpful and good luck for the future.

Yours sincerely

Andy McDowall Lead inspector