

Alumwell Infant School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 104143 |
| Local Authority | Walsall |
| Inspection number | 308526 |
| Inspection date | 5 December 2007 |
| Reporting inspector | Joyce Cox |

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

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| Type of school | Infant |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 4-7 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 266 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | John Price |
| Headteacher | Christine Scott |
| Date of previous school inspection | 7 February 2005 |
| School address | Primley Avenue Walsall WS2 9UP |
| Telephone number | 01922 720886 |
| Fax number | 01922 720886 |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the reasons for the improved achievement and attainment in writing in 2007, the actions to raise standards and achievement in mathematics, and standards and achievement in information and communication technology (ICT) and how well staff and pupils use it. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation, the school's own assessment records, and observation of the school at work, discussions with children, staff and governors, and analysis of parental questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in the self-evaluation form, were not justified. These have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This large infant school draws its pupils mainly from the area immediately surrounding the school. Many of the pupils come from families that face considerably challenging social and economic circumstances. A below-average number of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Over half of the pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and a significant number of pupils are at an early stage of learning English. Children's attainment when they start in the Reception classes is below the expected levels, particularly in their communication, mathematical and personal and social skills.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is an effective school which has many strengths. It provides a good education for its pupils in an attractive, stimulating learning environment, which fully reflects its aim to be 'an inclusive school where the achievements and attitudes of every child matter'. This ensures that pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their education. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. One comment reflected the opinions of many, 'The headteacher and staff do a wonderful job. In fact I would not send my children to any other school'. This success has been brought about by the purposeful and strong leadership of the headteacher and senior members of staff who have established rigorous systems and highly effective links with parents and the local community that help pupils settle quickly and achieve well.

Children in the Reception classes achieve well and many attain close to the expected levels on entry to Year 1 because learning activities are matched well to their needs. A strong emphasis on teaching children early speaking, writing and reading skills means they make good progress in these areas from an even lower starting point. However, they cannot practise their newly acquired skills in less formal situations because they have limited chances to choose their own learning or play activities. Since the last inspection, standards in both reading and writing at the end of Year 2 have been broadly average and, considering their low starting points, pupils' achievement in these subjects is good. In 2006-7, the school's leadership successfully led a focus on improving writing. A new system to track pupils' progress, training for staff and pupil targets resulted in considerably improved achievements and above average standards. However, 2006 and 2007 teacher assessments, at the end of Year 2, show a dip in mathematics standards to a little below average. The reason for this is that higher-attaining pupils are not doing as well as they could because they are not always sufficiently challenged in the tasks they are set. Lower-attaining pupils make good progress in all subjects because of the quality of support they receive. Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and those at an early stage of speaking English achieve well because their language skills are assessed quickly and they receive good support both in class and in small groups. The school's improved tracking systems have now been in place for a year and mean that individual pupils' progress is monitored very carefully from the time they enter the school and any potential problems are identified early. This enables teachers to take appropriate actions.

Pupils say they love school; as one child commented, 'Everything is splendid'. Their personal development and well-being are good. They behave well and enjoy taking responsibility by being school councillors and playground friends. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and lies at the heart of much of the school's work. Pupils' religions and cultures are valued and celebrated and there is respect for all. They support each other well and know the importance of helping others to succeed. As a result of the successful personal, social and health education, pupils understand how to keep themselves safe and healthy and enjoy a wide range of sports during and after school. Thanks to the school's good efforts, pupils' attendance remains broadly average. However, attendance figures are depleted because a small number of parents take their children out of school during term time to go on holiday.

The school's safe and supportive environment ensures all groups of pupils, including those learning English as an additional language and those with learning difficulties, succeed and make good progress. Parents recognise and appreciate the good care and support provided for all pupils. One parent says that her child, who had problems with reading and writing, has 'come

on in leaps and bounds because the staff go out of their way to help all the children'. A key reason why pupils achieve well is that the quality of teaching is good. There are strengths in the staff's high expectations for pupils' work and behaviour and in the way talented teaching assistants support small groups of pupils. Staff assess pupils' different learning needs carefully before placing pupils in ability groups for mathematics and English lessons, thereby enabling pupils to enjoy their work and feel they are successful. However, on some occasions, more able pupils are not challenged enough in some mathematics lessons. Staff make good use of precise assessment information to catalogue and track pupils' progress and to make predictions. Challenging targets are used effectively in helping pupils to attain well at the end of all year groups. Most pupils are aware of how they can improve their work and feel happy and confident in seeking support from all staff.

The good curriculum is enriched with many clubs, visits and visitors. ICT is used skilfully and effectively by many of the staff but pupils do not have enough chances to practise their ICT skills. The quality of care, guidance and support is good. There are good arrangements for guiding pupils on their academic performance, and the school's procedures for safeguarding pupils are robust. Highly effective links with parents, outside agencies and the local community enrich and enliven pupils' learning. The Parent Support Advisor provides effective support for pupils and their families.

The school's success is securely founded on good leadership and management, which have succeeded in all staff being much more involved in school improvement. Subject leaders and middle managers have newly-defined roles in the school's management, and are gradually producing action plans, which not only steer their subjects but also influence the priorities of the school's improvement plan. Governors are supportive and are developing well their role in evaluating the school's work. The headteacher has a good understanding of the school's strengths and wastes no time in identifying and taking action where improvements are required, for example in putting in highly effective measures to improve pupils' writing skills. This awareness of how to bring about further improvement, and the skilful tracking of pupils' progress, prove that the school has a good capacity for continued improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children's achievement in the Foundation Stage is good. Many children are on course to attain close to the expected levels on entry to Year 1. Children at an early stage of learning English achieve well as they have effective language support in small groups from bilingual staff. Teaching in the Foundation Stage is good and all children behave well and most appear to enjoy their learning. Improved liaison with the nearby Nursery school staff means that children settle quickly and happily and their personal development is good. Senior managers lead the Foundation Stage well and local advisors have helped staff understand how to plan an appropriate curriculum which ensures that children experience all of the expected areas of learning. The introduction of regular focused sessions to help children learn their letters and sounds and to practise their writing skills has improved their progress in these areas. However, there are few opportunities for children to practise their new skills and become increasingly independent, as they have limited chances to choose their own learning or play activities or to converse freely with each other. Staff make sure children are safe and well cared for in the indoor and much improved outdoor environment.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the challenge in mathematics lessons for higher-attaining pupils.
- Give all pupils more opportunities to practise their ICT skills.
- Allow Reception children opportunities to select their own learning and play activities.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| 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

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|---|-----|
| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 2 |
| 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 | 2 |

Achievement and standards

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| 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

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|---|---|
| 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

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|--|---|
| 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

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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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards | 2 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 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

6 December 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Alumwell Infant School, Walsall, WS2 9UP

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school. You certainly seem to be very happy and it was good to hear how you enjoy your work. We think your school gives you a good education and is working hard to make it even better.

There are lots of good things about your school:

- you are good at working hard, helping each other and listening to your teachers
- the staff care about you very much; they are good teachers and they make learning interesting and enjoyable for you
- your headteacher and other staff are good leaders and they make sure you all have a good time and do well
- anybody who needs extra help with their work or speaking English is always given it
- you like to be active and enjoy all the sport you do at lunchtime and after school
- you behave well and are kind to each other
- because of all these things, you make good progress and reach the expected standards.

Your headteacher and staff have lots of good ideas to make the school even better. We agree with their ideas and feel it would be good if those who find mathematics easy have harder work to do, if all of you had more chances to use computers and if Reception children could choose their own activities more often.

You can help your teachers by continuing to work hard.

We wish you all the very best for the future.

Joyce Cox Lead inspector