

Whitehall Junior Community School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104162
Local Authority	Walsall
Inspection number	308531
Inspection dates	5–6 March 2008
Reporting inspector	John Mason

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	295
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Colleen Jones
Headteacher	Andrew Bramwell
Date of previous school inspection	9 June 2003
School address	Delves Road Walsall WS1 3JY
Telephone number	01922 720778
Fax number	01922 720122

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Whitehall is a larger than average junior school, situated on the edge of its main catchment area in central Walsall. A large proportion of pupils come from circumstances experiencing a degree of social and economic disadvantage. One third are eligible for free school meals. Over three quarters come from a wide range of minority ethnic groups, close on half being of Pakistani ethnicity. Two thirds of pupils do not have English as their first language and the school receives additional funding to support pupils at an early stage in learning English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is twice the national average and the proportion with a statement of special educational need is above the national average. The school has a small number of pupils in public care. The school holds Sportsmark status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Whitehall is a satisfactory and rapidly improving school. The headteacher, in post for two years, has brought a wealth of experience to the school, engaging the staff fully in turning around a history of low standards and underachievement. The school now shares a clear vision for improvement which has been phased in very skilfully and sensitively. Each step in the school's recent development has been carefully planned to consolidate and build on initial successes.

The school's traditional strength in pastoral care has become more robust by linking it much more strongly to pupils' progress in lessons. The school's care, guidance and support of its pupils are good. It works very well in partnership with other agencies to promote pupils' well-being. Consequently, pupils' personal development is good. Pupils enjoy school and know they are making progress. Their good behaviour and consideration for one another contribute to a safe, orderly environment, and make for a cohesive multi-ethnic school. Rigorous assessment practices track the progress of all pupils carefully. Pupils needing particular support are identified well and effective measures are taken to address any obstacles to progress.

Pupils' achievement is now satisfactory overall, but those in the younger classes and those with English as an additional language are progressing well. Standards in Year 6 are closely approaching national expectations, while in Year 3 they are in line with expectations. This is because the quality of teaching has improved markedly in the past two years. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall and often good. Staff morale is good. Teachers set consistent expectations across the school for good behaviour and diligent, well-presented work, establishing good attitudes to learning. However, teachers do not challenge pupils of different abilities, in lessons and in homework, with sufficiently varied tasks, especially to stretch more able pupils.

The satisfactory curriculum has many good features. Special 'target' groups concentrate successfully on identified areas for improvement for groups of pupils in each year. The 'Big Writing' initiative is improving pupils' writing and encouraging them to become more reflective. Current work to improve aspects of the learning environment which constrain the curriculum include an ambitious plan to develop better information and communication technology (ICT) facilities, create space for drama and improve the acoustics of many classrooms. The school recognises the need to develop closer links between subjects to consolidate gains made in literacy and numeracy and to develop a broader approach to learning. Despite its many strengths, it is largely because many subject leaders are relatively inexperienced and still require guidance in developing a more tightly linked curriculum that leadership and management are satisfactory overall.

Since the previous inspection the school has made good progress in raising standards and improving the quality of teaching and assessment. It has a good capacity to consolidate its provision and improve further. Communication with parents is improving, as parents recognise when they say, 'the school has come a long way'. It has 'pulled its socks up and is now reaching its targets'.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement by increasing the proportion of good teaching ensuring that all pupils are challenged to make the full progress of which they are capable, particularly the more able.

- Develop the skills of subject leaders to equip them to take a greater role in raising standards and to develop more robust links between subjects.

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.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The pupils' standards when they enter the school are well below average. In the current Year 6 most pupils are making at least satisfactory progress, being broadly on course to meet targets in English and mathematics. In the younger classes standards are now average and pupils' progress is good. Progress in speaking and listening, a weakness identified in the previous inspection, is now satisfactory. There is little variation between the progress of boys and girls, but boys perform better than girls in mathematics, contrary to national trends. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress and those with English as an additional language make good progress. School data indicate that a small number of boys of Pakistani and White British heritage are not yet making adequate progress. In the 2007 national tests at the end of Year 6 standards were well below average, but, until changes in the nature of the cohort mid-year, pupils were on course to meet targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Although pupils come from disparate home settings, they get on well with one another, behave well around the school and concentrate in class. They pride themselves in displays of their work, often reflecting their different backgrounds and faiths. They know right from wrong and are courteous towards adults in the school. Their growing enjoyment of school is reflected in much improved, although average, attendance, and good punctuality. They participate enthusiastically in clubs, activities and visits. Involvement in physical exercise is good but the school's emphasis on healthy eating has not been fully grasped in practice. They make a good contribution to the community, for example, by acting as lunch monitors or playground pals and voicing opinions in the school council. Although many do not find this easy, they gain confidence in expressing their views and emotions as their basic skills in English and mathematics improve. They grow in self-esteem in the school. They make satisfactory progress in developing skills for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers know their pupils very well and good relationships are key to the purposeful attitudes of pupils to their learning. Routines in learning are well established and behaviour is well managed. Teachers have good subject knowledge and mostly convey this well, engaging the interest of the pupils. While some lessons can be exciting and motivating, others lack pace and do not challenge the full range of ability, particularly the most able pupils, sufficiently. Similarly, the amount and quality of homework set are not sufficiently tailored to individual pupils' ability.

Teaching assistants often provide valuable support for individuals, but the quality of their deployment in some classes is inconsistent.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is suitably planned to incorporate all subjects and meets statutory requirements, promoting achievement for all pupils. Very effective intervention programmes successfully counter underachievement. Provision for gifted and talented pupils is developing well, but there are too few planned tasks in lessons to challenge the most able. Enrichment activities add significantly to the pupils' enjoyment in school and include regular visits out of school, such as seeing Shakespeare's *Tempest* or visiting Llandudno. Supplementary activities offer something for everyone, building pupils' self-esteem and making school more interesting. The development of ICT skills is constrained by a poor computer suite with unreliable equipment, but teachers are growing in confidence in their use of interactive whiteboards and learning support programmes. Links between the subjects are not yet secure enough to help pupils make sufficient connections between them to accelerate and broaden their learning further. Learning French is still at an early stage.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pastoral care is good. Teachers act to address pupils' individual needs and concerns promptly. Rigorous systems support clear expectations for behaviour and attendance. Arrangements to protect pupils from harm and risk are outstanding. Good provision and support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, for English language acquisition and for vulnerable pupils include the regular use of external agencies to supplement the school's own initiatives, such as the welcoming breakfast club. Liaison with other schools to widen opportunity and ease the anxiety of transfer is improving. Increasingly, the school is helping those parents and carers who have difficulties in engaging in their children's education to do so. Despite some targets being expressed in language which pupils find difficult to understand, pupils know their targets and this helps them to be aware of what steps they need to take next to achieve well. Marking is regular and the quality of written comment is often helpful and constructive. The system for assessment in science has yet to become fully effective and systems to gather and act on pupils' views lack consistency at class level.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and deputy headteacher know the strengths, weaknesses and context of their school very well. Their complementary skills and good teamwork are well recognised and respected by teachers, governors and parents. Many subject leaders are new to post and lack extensive experience, but they receive good support in developing their skills. They are becoming more secure in their task of raising standards, but only some are beginning to develop links between subjects of the curriculum. All staff have a strong commitment to promoting equal opportunities. Careful monitoring of the performance of both pupils and teachers by senior leaders ensures that the whole school is on track and all pupils are now beginning to reach ambitious targets. A core of governors support the initiatives of the headteacher strongly and

have undertaken governor training. However, some governors take a less active role. The school provides good value for money.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
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	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?	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?	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	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	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

7 March 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Whitehall Community Junior School, Walsall, WS1 3JY

Thank you all for your very warm welcome when Mrs Walker, Mrs Martin and I visited you recently. We very much enjoyed speaking to you and watching you learn.

You and your parents told us that your school has improved a lot in the past few years and we agree. You are now making better progress in your work and reaching standards expected for your age. That is because the staff are determined to keep your school improving and help you learn better. We think they are doing this pretty well at the moment but we are confident, like Mr Bramwell, that they can do this even better and all become very good teachers. One way they can make lessons better is to develop a wider range of activities in class, so that those of you who find work easy, in particular, have to think more deeply about the tasks you are given.

We were also pleased to see how much you enjoy school and how well you behave in class and around the school. You are putting into practice well all those things that your teachers say about being kind and respectful to one another. You acted very responsibly when the fire alarm went off accidentally. You clearly enjoy the clubs and sporting activities which contribute to making you healthy and more creative young people. Some of you, though, should bring healthier food in your lunch boxes.

A real strength of your school is the way teachers care about your concerns and give you extra support. The 'target' groups are very effective in helping you with your learning and the breakfast club helps many of you settle into school routines well. Those of you who find English difficult or who have difficulties in learning or disabilities are well cared for with good individual attention where it is needed.

Your school is getting better because Mr Bramwell has carefully made sure that all the adults know what works well in your school. When the building works are complete you will have better classrooms and better facilities for drama and for using computers. We have also asked your teachers to make stronger links between the different subjects to broaden your learning further.

We hope you carry on enjoying your learning, so that you have successful and fulfilling futures ahead of you.

Yours sincerely

Mr John Mason Lead inspector

7 March 2008

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Mr John Mason
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