

Palmers Cross Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104309
Local Authority	Wolverhampton
Inspection number	308568
Inspection dates	5–6 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Carol Parkinson

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	171
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Margaret Bonsell
Headteacher	Carole Fenton
Date of previous school inspection	6 October 2003
School address	Windermere Road Tettenhall Wolverhampton WV6 9DF
Telephone number	01902 558322
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This school is slightly smaller than the average primary school. Only a third of the pupils come from the immediate surroundings. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is higher than average, as is the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school has a resource base with children split into three teaching groups which provide for 21 pupils with language and communication difficulties. At the time of the inspection, the school had an acting headteacher.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a happy school and its strength is in its care for its pupils. It has had a difficult time in the last year because of the long-term absence of its headteacher and this has held up its progress. It provides a satisfactory standard of education and pupils' achievement is adequate. Standards are average at the end of Year 2 and Year 6. The school's national test scores in English indicate that writing is still the weakest element of pupils' work, but steps have been taken to address this and standards are now rising. The less able and pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those in the resource bases, make satisfactory progress because of additional adult support and careful guidance. More able pupils now make adequate progress because the school is making strenuous efforts to use assessment of pupils' previous learning to plan suitable work for them.

The quality of teaching has improved in the last year because of thorough monitoring carried out by the school's leaders, who have been supported by the local authority. There is no inadequate teaching and there is an increasing amount of good teaching which is well based on pupils' previous knowledge and presents a suitable level of challenge. Pupils enjoy their lessons and are keen to learn.

The school provides satisfactory care, guidance and support. The quality of pastoral care is very good and so pupils feel safe, have a good understanding of how to live a healthy lifestyle and enjoy coming to school. Academic guidance is not as strong. The quality of marking is variable and pupils are not always clear about what they need to do to improve their work, nor are they sure of their targets. The school provides a satisfactory curriculum but is aware that it provides too few opportunities for independent learning and literacy and that the use of information and communication technology (ICT) is an area for development. Pupils and staff are rightly proud of their achievements in sport, and this gives the school a sense of community and purpose. Relationships amongst the pupils and with adults are good and this helps to foster good behaviour in and around school. Links with outside agencies are good and ensure that there is good support for vulnerable pupils.

The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory. In the absence of the school's own headteacher, the acting headteacher has provided good leadership to continue initiatives already started and to help confirm the good contribution of subject managers to lead in their own areas and raise the standards of pupils' achievements. Clear priorities are identified to improve the quality of education offered to pupils and the supportive governors hold the school to account for its standards adequately.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the Foundation Stage is good. Standards in communication, language and literacy and some aspects of personal development are below those normally expected when they start school. However, children make rapid progress in response to good teaching, especially in communication, language and literacy and aspects of mathematics. The staff set challenging targets which are based on rigorous assessment of children's abilities. Standards are broadly average by the time children enter Year 1.

Some children find it difficult to listen, although they have a lot to say. They learn well from activities which teach them to take turns, improve their vocabulary and to explain themselves

to others. Adults provide many exciting opportunities for them to extend their language through different play activities and stories. The children demonstrated their confidence, enjoyment and ability to remember a sequence of events when they performed their version of 'The Bear Hunt' to the whole school in assembly with flamboyant success. Teachers' planning is not detailed enough when setting up opportunities for children's independent learning. As a result, some activities are repetitive and children do not learn as fast as they could because they do not have enough new things to do.

Children in Reception are happy, busy and full of fun. They love coming to school and are very keen to explain what they are doing. They are inquisitive about others. They work together in a healthy environment and adults set good standards for behaviour and relationships.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing and use the curriculum better to provide more opportunities for literacy.
- Ensure teachers' marking provides suitable guidance for pupils to improve their work.
- Make better use of ICT to improve skills, communication, research and exploration.
- Ensure that pupils are clear about their targets and what they have to do to reach them.

A small proportion of 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

Standards have declined gradually since the previous inspection, particularly in English. Results in the 2007 national tests were well below average in writing at the end of Year 2 and below average in English at the end of Year 6. The school has introduced new systems to improve literacy and these have improved standards rapidly for all groups of pupils. As a result, standards are broadly average in English, mathematics and science at the end of Years 2 and 6 and pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Writing remains the weakest aspect of pupils' work.

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including older pupils in the resource base, make satisfactory progress because they have effective additional support from adults. The progress of younger pupils with language and communication difficulties, however, has been slowed because of disruptions to their teaching caused by staff absence this term.

Children in Reception make good progress in all areas of learning. This is the first year that there has been one intake instead of two to school and this means that younger children will be better prepared for Year 1 because they have been in school for longer.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Pupils enjoy coming to school. Their attendance is satisfactory, having improved significantly in the last two years. They show care and respect for each other and for adults. Pupils behave well in class and around the school. They have a good understanding of right and wrong and express their ideas clearly when stories present them with examples of moral dilemmas. There are opportunities for pupils to explore spiritual values and cultural life but these do not happen often enough. Pupils have

a good understanding of safety and they know who to turn to if they are upset. Pupils are well informed about how to live a healthy lifestyle. They know which food is healthy and can make choices based on that understanding. They participate well in sport and know exercise makes them strong.

Pupils' skills and understanding to help them in the future are adequate. Although they are developing satisfactory literacy and numeracy skills, older pupils do not use computers enough as tools for communication or research or develop sufficient independent learning skills. Pupils appreciate the school council and see it as an important part of school life where their views are represented. They raise money for those less fortunate than themselves and are involved in the running of the school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory, although it varies from class to class. In the best lessons, there is brisk pace, good explanation and the intention of the lesson is made clear. Tasks are set for all levels of ability, work is challenging and fun, and all groups make good progress. Teaching in the Reception class is good and children's attainment and progress are assessed thoroughly so that challenging work is planned for them. Further up the school, teachers' use of assessment to plan suitable work for all groups of pupils is less consistent and so pupils' progress is not as fast as it could be in every class. Sometimes, work is too difficult or repetitive for pupils, and they lose concentration as a result. Relationships between adults and pupils are good so that there is a good working atmosphere.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum meets requirements and is adapted reasonably well to meet the needs of pupils. It enables pupils to build on their previous learning and takes into account their wide range of needs and varying backgrounds and cultures so they make satisfactory progress. The wide range of sport, exercise, breakfast and after school clubs supports pupils' personal development well. Some parents and pupils suggest that the school is not setting enough homework to consolidate learning. Inspectors agree this is true, particularly in English. There are too few opportunities to integrate literacy and ICT developments in other areas of the curriculum, though there are some good examples of writing in geography and science. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is adequate. In the resource bases, however, lack of resources, in particular the lack of relevant ICT to support communication, literacy and the formal timetabled lessons, do not always provide the best stimulus or environment to challenge and inspire these pupils to do better.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The level of care that pupils enjoy is very good and is a strong feature of the school. All the systems needed to keep them safe from harm are in place and meet statutory requirements. Good records are kept to provide helpful information and ensure pupils' well-being. Links with outside agencies are good and ensure that there is effective support for vulnerable pupils. Teachers and staff are hard working and caring so pupils feel safe and well looked after.

Academic guidance is satisfactory. Marking is still too variable in quality but it is beginning to give pupils a better idea of how to improve their work. Pupils know they have literacy and numeracy targets and find the recently introduced group targets a helpful reminder of their aims.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Recently, the school has had a difficult time because of the long-term absence of the headteacher and, as a result, there had been a lack of momentum in school improvement. Governors recognised that they needed to take action to stop slippage continuing in essential projects such as the use of assessment and tracking to help plan effective lessons, improving marking, the development of the role of subject leaders and raising standards in English. All these issues were raised at the previous inspection and improvement had been slow. The school's headteacher had begun to monitor teaching with the help of the local authority to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

A part-time acting headteacher, in post for two months, has galvanised the school into action and built rapidly on the substantial systems put in place but not fully implemented by the school's own headteacher. Through the drive and clear direction of the acting headteacher and the good support of the subject leaders, leadership has regained a clear perspective quickly and through its self-evaluation has defined suitable priorities for improvement. It is putting these into effect at a good pace.

Governance is satisfactory. The chair of governors and other governors are very caring and supportive of the school and meet regularly, but since the previous inspection, they had not held the school to account strongly enough for its standards.

Recently, however, governors have known the school's strengths and weaknesses better and have a clearer understanding of the need for monitoring through its steering group. The school's capacity for improvement is satisfactory because of the recent implementation of the school's systems, more defined priorities for improvement, good middle management and better informed governors.

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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	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 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	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

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	2
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

06 March 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Palmers Cross Primary School, Wolverhampton, WV6 9DF

Thank you very much for your warm and friendly welcome to us during the inspection of your school. We thoroughly enjoyed our time with you and were pleased with the way you discussed your life at school with us. In this letter, we are going to explain what we have found out:

- You behave well most of the time and you treat other children and adults kindly and fairly.
- You enjoy coming to school very much and feel safe and happy there.
- You have a good understanding of what you need to do to be healthy.
- Sometimes, lessons are a bit too hard or a bit too easy for some of you.
- You do not get enough chances to use computers to research your work.
- You do not get enough homework, especially in English!
- All the adults take good care of you at school and help you.
- Everybody at school works hard.
- You can be very proud of your achievements in sport.
- We think you have a good understanding of what the school is like and that the school council does good work.

We want to help your school to become even better so we have asked the staff to:

- help you to improve your writing in all of your subjects
- make sure you all know how to improve your work and what you expect to learn
- make sure the work is just difficult enough to make you think hard and learn well
- find more opportunities for you to use information and communication technology.

We loved seeing the assembly when the Reception class performed 'The Bear Hunt'. It shows how well you can speak to an audience and remember stories. We hope you all go on enjoying school and working hard, and we wish you all success in the future. Yours sincerely

Miss Barbara Parkinson Lead inspector