

Knowsley Village School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104423
Local Authority	Knowsley
Inspection number	308596
Inspection dates	13–14 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Mark Williams HMI

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	169
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr A Taylor
Headteacher	Mrs S Shields
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2004
School address	Sugar Lane Knowsley Prescot Merseyside L34 0ER
Telephone number	0151 2895349
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average-size primary school. It is set in a semi-rural area of the Metropolitan Borough of Knowsley. In line with local and national trends, the number on roll is falling. Nearly all pupils are of white British heritage. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is similar to the national average but varies between age groups. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The school has attained a number of awards, including the Active Mark.

Owing to concerns about standards and rates of progress, the school has been part of the local authority's intensive support programme since September 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to raising levels of pupil progress across the school, particularly in Key Stage 2 and for the more able.

This is a caring school where pupils are happy. They enjoy positive relationships with the staff and each other. Their personal development and well-being are good and are the strength of the school's work. This is because, until recently, the main focus of leaders has been the care of the pupils. Over time though, as pupils' rates of progress in their learning declined and standards dropped to significantly low levels, they became aware that this focus lacked balance and that much needed to be done to raise levels of achievement. As the headteacher correctly says, 'We should be doing better.'

Pupil progress overall is inadequate. This underachievement is set against a backdrop of broadly average ability on entry to the Foundation Stage. It is particularly marked in Key Stage 2 and with the more able pupils. Overall standards at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2005 and 2006 were significantly below the national average. Over the last two years, no pupil in Key Stage 1 has achieved the higher Level 3 in writing. This is because teaching overall is only satisfactory and work is not always matched well to pupil ability. The improvements in standards at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2007, secured with the help of the local authority's intensive support programme, are welcome. However, these represent satisfactory rather than good progress. For pupils currently in the school, rates of progress are not fast enough. The school itself has recognised that there is likely to be significant underachievement this year, in particular for the more able pupils.

The quality of teaching and the curriculum are satisfactory. Good teaching is not a consistent feature. Teachers' questioning does not always challenge pupils to give reasons for their answers which extend their thinking. There are insufficient opportunities for pupils to work independently. However, where challenge is evident progress in lessons is good. The curriculum is enhanced by creative weeks and educational visits. It does not, for example, in subjects such as history and geography, provide pupils with opportunities to put their literacy and numeracy skills into practice. This is one reason why the percentage of pupils achieving the higher levels at the end of Key Stage 1 and 2 is low. Another reason why pupils do not achieve as well as they can is that they do not fully understand their targets for improvement. This means academic guidance is variable.

Despite concerns raised and past failings, there is clear capacity within the senior leadership team and the school, particularly with key appointments made over the last four terms, to make the improvements necessary. Leaders at all levels have embraced the support from the local authority and are working diligently to secure improvement, building on the relative success of last year. Governors, in particular, have recognised their responsibility to hold the school to account and are doing so satisfactorily. Plans are in place to continue improvement. The headteacher is aware of the urgency for success and her responsibility for providing her committed and eager staff with clear direction.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children enter the Foundation Stage with a wide range of abilities that are broadly typical for their age, although some have less well developed social and language skills. Having recognised this, the school participates in a programme designed to raise children's early reading and writing skills. By the time children enter Year 1, most have made satisfactory progress against the Early Learning Goals in all areas of their development.

Children settle well and know the classroom routines. Staff are very caring and relationships are good. Communication with parents/carers is good. Teaching is satisfactory, overall and typically children play happily using all the areas available. However, time is not always used well. For example, children spend too long waiting between tasks and, in some cases, sitting on the carpet without any identified purpose. Foundation Stage staff are aware of this. They are also aware teachers' planning does not focus clearly on what children are to learn and how the teaching will enable them to make progress. They are working with local authority consultants to address these issues.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve rates of pupil progress so that they are at least satisfactory.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that all lessons are consistently good or better.
- Provide opportunities across the curriculum to develop basic skills in English and mathematics.
- Ensure that academic guidance makes clear the next steps of learning.
- Improve the quality of strategic leadership.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Achievement and standards are judged to be inadequate, overall. This is because pupils in Key Stage 2 do not make the progress of which they are capable. In 2005 the school was in the bottom 1% of schools nationally for progress between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. In 2006 it was in the lowest 4%. This poor progress represented substantial underachievement and resulted in declining standards. In 2007, standards in Key Stage 2 improved and were in line with national averages. This is because of the school's participation in the local authority's intensive support programme. While the school was rightly pleased with this rise, it represents only satisfactory rather than good progress and still includes significant underachievement for the more able pupils. The current picture of improvement across Key Stage 2 is not strong enough to sustain the progress made in 2007. This is because the quality of teaching is satisfactory rather than good and work is not always well matched to pupil ability. The school itself has recognised that there is likely to be significant underachievement, in particular for the more able pupils this year. It has therefore set challenging targets for the current Year 6 pupils to achieve in 2008 and the current Year 5 the following year.

During Key Stage 1 most pupils make satisfactory progress in reading, writing and mathematics and consequently standards by the end of Year 2 are broadly average. However, too few pupils attain the higher levels in these subjects. In writing, for example, there have been no pupils achieving the higher Level 3 for the past two years. Overall, the achievement of the more able pupils across the school is inadequate. Work provided for them is insufficiently challenging.

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress in their learning. This is because, in contrast with the more able, their needs are identified and support is targeted accordingly.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

This is the strength of the school. Pupils' spiritual, moral, cultural and social development is good and enhanced by their good manners and behaviour. They, and their parents/carers, report that they enjoy school very much. Their enjoyment is further highlighted by improved rates of attendance which is satisfactory.

Pupils talk confidently to one another and to adults. They talk freely about their understanding of healthy living, including the need to stay safe. They participate in a range of activities including sport and dancing. When given opportunities to work in pairs or groups, they do so well. They particularly value the work of the school council which has been successful in securing improvements to the school environment, for example, benches and tables in the 'Chill Out' area. Pupils' contribution to the life of the school and community is good. They raise money for charity, for example, through sweet stalls and 'Jim Jam Jogs'. Within the school older pupils act as healthy tuck shop monitors, play-leaders and 'buddies' to younger children. The skills they are developing through such activities mean that, despite poor rates of progress in learning, their preparation for future economic well-being is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

During the inspection the teaching observed ranged from good to inadequate. This range is also evident in pupils' current work. Relationships in lessons between adults and pupils, and between the pupils themselves, are good. The school is making use of the intensive support programme to improve the quality of teaching. However, there is not enough good teaching to allow pupils, particularly in Key Stage 2, to make at least satisfactory progress. One of the key reasons for this is that the work planned for pupils is not accurately matched to their ability. This means that the more able pupils in particular are insufficiently challenged in lessons. Teachers do not stretch pupils' understanding through probing questions and there is an over reliance on published worksheets. Opportunities for learning are sometimes wasted through the poor use of time.

Nonetheless, examples of good teaching are evident. For example, in a science lesson taught to a class of Year 3 and 4 pupils, the teacher successfully challenged pupils of all abilities to record a recent investigation involving separation. The teacher made clear to pupils what they were to do and what they were learning. As a result, progress in this lesson was good. This, however, is not a consistent feature throughout the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

At the time of the previous inspection the school was asked to continue to improve provision in information and communication technology (ICT). It was also asked to extend pupils' opportunities for independent work appropriate to their individual needs in all subjects. Despite

recent and appropriate interventions, for example, from the newly appointed ICT subject leader, progress in these areas over time has been slow. Overall, the curriculum is satisfactory.

The intervention of the local authority caused the school to place achievement at the heart of the curriculum. As a result of this much needed change, provision for English and mathematics has improved. Nonetheless, there is some way to go before the school meets the needs of all pupils and provides sufficient challenge for them to make good progress in their learning. Opportunities to develop basic literacy and numeracy skills are missed in the foundation subjects such as history, geography, art and religious education. In these subjects there is an over reliance on completing worksheets and too few opportunities for pupils to work independently.

Enhancements to the curriculum include, in recent years, creative arts and art festival weeks. A range of extra-curricular activities is provided. Pupils appreciate the visitors to school and the opportunities to visit places of interest.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

This area of the school's work is satisfactory. Safeguarding arrangements meet current government regulations. Children are inducted into the school well and settle quickly. Parents and pupils report positively on the approachability of staff throughout the school. When pupils leave for secondary school they are helped to transfer smoothly.

The learning mentor makes a good contribution to the care, guidance and support of pupils. He enables the school council to operate efficiently and has overseen effective measures, including first day response to improve levels of attendance. Despite the school's best efforts too many holidays are taken in term time. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified early. The special education needs coordinator ensures they receive appropriate support.

Academic guidance is inconsistent. The marking of pupils' work is sometimes cursory and does not always give clear guidance on what must be done to improve. Pupils have individual targets but they are not altogether clear what they are or how they are to achieve them.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

A new senior leadership team was created in September 2006. Their understanding of what the school needs to achieve, and what they need to do to secure this, demonstrates satisfactory capacity to improve. Raising pupil achievement is now at the centre of its plans for improving the school. The school has responded well to strong local authority guidance and the demands of the intensive support programme and, as a result, pupils in Key Stage 2 made satisfactory progress in their learning for the first time in three years. Leaders are aware that to improve rates of progress for all pupils, and in Key Stage 2 in particular, the quality of teaching needs to be at least good. This has been rightly identified in their development plan. However, the headteacher does not always provide teachers with clear feedback about their work and the analysis of information gained from lesson observations is muddled. This means that good practice is not routinely shared or developed and this slows improvement. The school has set challenging targets but the headteacher has not made these sufficiently clear.

The school's self-evaluation is broadly accurate. It identifies appropriate ways forward. The mechanisms for checking and evaluating these plans are developing. Leaders are aware of the need to ensure plans are focused on outcomes for pupils and are always measurable. Governors recognise that the quality of such specific information helps them to hold the school to account. Overall, governance is satisfactory. The establishment of a standards committee focusing on pupil achievement is a positive step forward and further emphasises satisfactory capacity to improve. The governors remain committed to small class sizes, the training of staff and working with subject leaders. However, given the small class sizes in all but one class and the inadequate rates of progress, value for money is unsatisfactory.

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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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
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	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	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	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
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?	Yes

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you very much for your welcome to both Mrs Jones and myself when we inspected your school recently. We were both impressed by your friendliness, behaviour and good manners. We could see that your school council works very well on your behalf and that you enjoy coming to school. All the adults in the school look after you very well.

However, we are concerned that you are not making sufficient progress in your learning. We have therefore given your school a notice to improve. We have asked your headteacher to make sure that: you make at least satisfactory progress in your learning; all lessons are at least good; you have the opportunities to develop literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects; and that you know your targets and how you are to achieve them. Inspectors will visit your school again next year to check that matters have improved.

We know you will be disappointed in this report, but we have every confidence that you will work with all the adults to make things better.