

Larkfield Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104887
Local Authority	Sefton
Inspection number	308697
Inspection date	9 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Derek Aitken

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	5-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	270
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Helen Stead
Headteacher	Mr T Baldwin
Date of previous school inspection	29 September 2003
School address	Preston New Road Southport Merseyside PR9 8PA
Telephone number	01704 224720
Fax number	01704 214786

Age group	5-11
Inspection date	9 October 2007
Inspection number	308697

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: pupils' achievement, (especially in writing), the quality of assessment and academic guidance, and the effectiveness of the systems the school has for monitoring its performance. The inspector gathered evidence from the school's self-evaluation, national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records, policies and minutes, observation of the school at work, interviews with senior members of staff and pupils and the parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in similar detail. The evidence found the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, to be justified, except with regard to the quality of care, guidance and support which was judged to be good rather than outstanding.

Description of the school

This is a slightly larger than average sized school situated in a residential area to the north of the town. The number on roll has declined by about a third in recent years due to demographic reasons. Pupils come from a variety of backgrounds but social and economic circumstances are generally favourable. The vast majority of pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The school is a resource school for a small number of pupils who require individual support for their physical and medical difficulties. On entry to Reception, children's attainment is broadly in line with what is expected for their age, but speech and language skills are relatively weaker.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school in which pupils achieve well. Parents and carers are very supportive of the school and value the contribution it makes to educating 'the whole child' and 'preparing children well for secondary education'. The school is, as parents agree, 'A bright, happy and friendly place, where pupils progress well.'

Children make good progress in the Foundation Stage, but there are still relative weaknesses in their writing and mathematical development when they begin Year 1. The school's implementation of a new strategy to improve writing in all year groups is accelerating progress and ensuring that these weaknesses are progressively eliminated by Year 2. Although the most recent national assessments of Year 2 pupils were lower than usual for the school, they reflected good progress in relation to pupils' earlier attainment. The school's results in the national tests at the end of Year 6 dipped to average in 2005 and 2006, largely due to some weaknesses in pupils' writing. However, significant improvements to writing this year have ensured that standards are once again above average. This represented good progress for the group of Year 6 pupils who took the tests in 2007. Most of the other year groups make similarly good progress and the present able cohort of Year 6 pupils is already working at an above average level. Pupils' achievement in science is consistently good, due to skilled teaching and pupils' enthusiasm for engaging in practical investigations. Boys and girls achieve equally well. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also achieve well because they are effectively supported in their work.

Pupils' personal development is good. So, too, is the quality of care, guidance and support the school provides. It strikes an effective balance of nurturing children and promoting their self-confidence. An example of this is the breakfast club, where staff assist pupils, if needed, in playing a range of games, such as skittles, but give them responsibility for organising the games and keeping scores on tally charts. The developing opportunities for pupils to contribute to the work of the school, for example, through the school council and as play leaders, support their independence. Pupils enjoy a wide range of subjects and extra-curricular activities, especially sport. They have exploited these opportunities successfully, for example, by emerging as local cross-country champions for the last six years. Pupils have a good understanding of healthy food and other aspects of healthy lifestyles. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils behave well, are open and welcoming and take particularly good care of the pupils with physical difficulties in their midst. The school's procedures for ensuring their welfare are regularly monitored and updated. Strong relationships ensure pupils are confident in sharing concerns about their work or personal problems with adults. The school has effective liaison with outside agencies to support pupils with identified needs. The pupils' good grasp of basic skills sets them up well for later life.

The school's tracking system is based on comprehensive data on the pupils' progress. Targets for pupils' progress are satisfactory, however, rather than challenging, and do not contribute fully to the school's drive for consistently good achievement.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers reinforce good relationships and capitalise effectively on pupils' responsiveness and positive attitudes. Prior learning is recapped well and lessons move at a good pace as pupils understand clearly what they have to do. Teachers plan for an appropriate mix of teacher-directed and independent work. Lessons in some subjects, for example, science, and art and design, have a real buzz to them because pupils particularly

enjoy the practical tasks. Resources, including information and communication technology are used well to sustain pupils' interest and concentration. While teachers' marking is conscientious and often contains detailed comments, it is insufficiently related to individual targets to push pupils' learning on very quickly. Opportunities are missed in lessons for pupils to assess their own learning and so gain a better understanding of their next steps.

The curriculum makes a good contribution to pupils' learning and personal development. Recent well delivered initiatives are having a considerable impact on standards in personal development and on the older pupils' enthusiasm for writing. A new link with a partner school in China is successfully widening pupils' cultural horizons, and extra-curricular sporting activities are well supported. Effective individual education plans provide the basis for good support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The quality of other intervention arrangements is satisfactory. However, reductions to staffing have delayed plans for evaluating their impact thoroughly to ensure that they are arranged in the best ways possible to support pupils' achievement.

Leadership and management are good. The challenging task of maintaining standards against a background of reorganisation resulting from a falling roll has been managed well. The ensuing budgetary constraints reduced staffing levels, slowed down some curricular innovation, and produced an ever-changing alternation of mixed-and single-age classes. The school population is now stable and the pace of improvement is picking up again, as reflected in the improving standards. The headteacher and governors have a very clear understanding of their key priorities for future improvement. Arrangements for enabling other key staff to develop a fuller perspective on the performance of the school and to contribute more fully to its improvement are under-developed. As a result, managers at all levels are not yet able to account precisely for strengths and areas of weakness in the achievement of all pupils.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The Foundation Stage provides a good education for the youngest children. Children make good progress overall in their learning and reach a good level of development. When they leave the Reception class, the majority are working securely within, and some exceed, the early learning goals. Children make particularly good progress in areas such as personal and creative development because resources are used well to enable them to pursue the choices they make and engage fully in their learning. Self-confidence is effectively promoted by good opportunities to present and talk about their work to the other children and through the incentive of having their creative achievements attractively displayed. The children are well taught and their progress is aided by high quality lesson planning, a well balanced curriculum, and regular assessments. The Foundation Stage is led and managed well.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make better use of assessment information to set more challenging targets to support the achievement of pupils.
- Involve pupils more effectively in assessing their work to help them learn faster.
- Develop effective systems to ensure all managers can contribute fully to school self-evaluation.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	----------------

Overall effectiveness

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

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
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

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?	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

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	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	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

Inspection of Larkfield Primary School, Southport, PR9 8PA.

I visited your school recently to find out how well you are learning. Thank you for making me welcome and being helpful when I talked to you. I was lucky to have the opportunity to speak to some of you at greater length. I was pleased to listen to your varied reasons for enjoying things in school and was very impressed to hear about your successes in cross-country running. It was great to see how well you take good care of each other, including the pupils with physical difficulties. The breakfast club provides a very good start to the school day.

Your school gives you a good education. You have good opportunities to develop your skills and talents. All this helps you to become more confident and develop well both personally and socially. I agree with you that the staff look after you well. They know each of you as individuals and work hard to ensure you all get along well with each other. You play your part in this by mixing well and showing respect for each other. Your teachers ensure that you learn many useful things and make your learning interesting. This helps you make good progress. I really understood why you said 'learning is fun' when I visited a science class. Your enthusiasm for carrying out practical investigations is the reason you do particularly well in this subject. The teachers are working particularly hard to help you develop your skills in writing and I was able to see signs of good improvement.

There are three things that I have asked the headteacher and staff to do to make your learning better. First, to use all the information they have about the standards you reach in your work a little better to ensure your progress is consistent. This will involve them setting some of you more challenging targets. Second, to ensure you are all involved better in checking and assessing your work to help you learn faster. Finally, for all staff to work very closely together to check how well the school is doing.