

Rock Ferry Primary School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 105045 |
| Local Authority | Wirral |
| Inspection number | 308751 |
| Inspection dates | 30 April –1 May 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Sheila O'Keeffe |

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

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 3–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 296 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mrs Barbara Oakley |
| Headteacher | Mrs J Lambeth |
| Date of previous school inspection | 14 June 2004 |
| School address | Ionic Street Rock Ferry Birkenhead Merseyside CH42 2BL |
| Telephone number | 0151 6451017 |
| Fax number | 0151 6457511 |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is situated in an area of severe social disadvantage and the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is exceptionally high. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above average. Around one quarter of pupils start or leave the school at other than the usual times, a much higher figure than in most schools. The school works with the local authority to accommodate specialist provision for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. Most pupils are of White British heritage with a small group of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, most of whom speak English as an additional language. The school works in partnership with a children's centre on site. The school has gained the Basic Skills Quality Mark, Healthy School status and Activemark, plus an Inclusion Award from the local authority.

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

The school provides a good education. The care it provides for pupils is outstanding. Pupils' personal development and academic achievement are good. In recent years, standards have been well below average in English, mathematics and science at the end of Key Stage 2, although standards in the current Year 6 are improving because of strong teaching. Pupils make good progress overall in relation to the exceptionally low levels of skill they bring with them when they start school and the significant barriers to learning many face. An important factor in addressing some previous underachievement has been the lead taken by the headteacher and the senior leadership team. They have sought help from consultants and the local authority specialists and worked in partnership to make improvements in the curriculum and teaching and learning to tackle the issue successfully. However, standards in English and mathematics are still not high enough.

Pupils have good attitudes to learning. The programme for personal, social and health education combined with strong pastoral support results in good behaviour. Pupils take on responsibilities around school and an active school council provides them with the opportunity to have their views taken into account. Pupils enjoy school but while many strive to achieve good attendance not all manage to be punctual and the attendance of a significant minority is poor. As a result, attendance overall is below the national average. Pupils have a good awareness of healthy eating and the importance of exercise, coupled with a good sense of personal safety. They develop basic skills of literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology (ICT) as well as independence and teamwork, to help them in secondary education.

Outstanding levels of care and support provided by the school contribute strongly to these positive outcomes. A comment typical of many parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire is: 'I am very pleased with my children's progress at this school. I feel the teachers work very hard encouraging them to do well and to keep trying.' Guidance for academic progress is consistent across classes and highly supportive of pupils' progress.

The quality of teaching and learning is good with some outstanding practice evident. This results in good achievement throughout the school. Lesson planning is good and the teamwork with teaching assistants strong. Marking of pupils' work is consistently good and informs pupils how they can improve and reach their targets for learning. The curriculum is good. There is effective coverage of English and mathematics and stimulating topics through the new curriculum together with interesting visits and visitors to school. The curriculum links subjects together well, allowing transference of key basic skills. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good, enabling these pupils to make good progress.

Leadership and management, including governance, are good. The senior leadership team has a clear focus on raising standards and the impact of the resulting measures they take is reflected in the good progress pupils make. The school has detailed information on how well individual pupils are doing. In the main, it sets challenging targets. However, limitations in its systems need to be rectified to ensure that pupils in different groups can be tracked more effectively. On the basis of progress since the last inspection and the impact of measures being taken to make improvements, the school has good capacity to improve and gives good value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children's attainment on entry to the Foundation Stage is extremely low. Their personal and social skills and ability to communicate effectively through language are particularly poor. Children benefit tremendously from the school's good provision and make good progress in all areas. However, because of their very low starting points their standards are still considerably below those expected for their age when they begin Year 1, and in some aspects well below. For example, a significant number of children continue to have weak speaking skills despite the best efforts of skilled staff to help them overcome this barrier to their learning. Similarly, although children's personal and social skills improve considerably, for some children the continuing reliance on 'dummies' and their delayed toilet training hinders their progress. The irregular attendance of many children limits opportunities for them to enjoy and achieve. When children are in school their enjoyment in the wide range of stimulating activities is unmistakeable and the impact of the provision on their development significant. The Foundation Stage manager provides very good leadership for the team of trained early years staff. The balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities is well organised, with adults intervening very well in children's play to take their learning forward. Children's progress is regularly assessed and carefully tracked. The promotion of children's personal, social and emotional development and language skills is high on the agenda and addressed very effectively. Recent accommodation improvements have placed some limitations on the use of the outdoor environment but there are plans to rectify this situation in the near future.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards in English and mathematics.
- Ensure that tracking the progress of pupils in different groups is improved in order that challenging targets are met.
- Improve attendance to at least the national average.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Although standards are well below the national average by the end of Year 6, they are improving and pupils achieve well in relation to their exceptionally low starting points and the barriers to learning many face. The proportions of Year 6 pupils attaining the expected Level 4 in English and mathematics in the 2007 national tests were similar to the national average, but far fewer pupils than nationally attained the higher level in these subjects. Those pupils who did not attain the expected level made better progress in English than in mathematics. The school has analysed the reasons for this and is taking effective action to make improvements. The high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including the pupils in the Key Stage 2 specialised provision, make good progress. In the last couple of years other groups of pupils, such as the more able, have not always progressed as well as they might, due to some weaknesses in provision. This was reflected in the progress indicators in the school's 2007 Year 6 national test results for English, mathematics and science. This situation has been resolved and the large majority of pupils are now progressing well. However, irregular attendance continues to limit the achievement of a significant minority of pupils and health and emotional traumas disrupt the progress of some. Factors such as these, coupled with weaknesses in systems for tracking pupils' progress, have, in some years, prevented the school from reaching the generally challenging targets they set. Pupils who are learning to speak English as an additional

language make good progress in response to the good additional language support provided to meet their specific needs.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. By the time pupils reach their final year their successful journey of social development is evident in their mature behaviour. Pupils feel valued, respected and enjoy school. Behaviour is good and pupils are polite and considerate. Levels of attendance are below average but improving as a result of clear reward systems and good procedures for targeting the families of the few poor attenders. Pupils report that they feel safe in school. The 'staff buddy pupil' system provides good support for vulnerable pupils. Older pupils befriend younger ones through the 'good buddy' scheme. Pupils have a sensible attitude to healthy eating and enjoy activities that are available to them at playtimes and after school. They undertake responsibilities well to help the school community, acting as school councillors and playground buddies. There are good links with the community, including modern foreign language support from local secondary schools. Pupils are keen to raise money for charities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good throughout the school. Teachers' planning is improving to ensure that work is better matched to pupils' needs so all are challenged and enabled to make good progress. Lesson objectives and teachers' expectations are shared clearly with pupils. This gives pupils a good insight into the purpose of the work set and what they must do to show their teachers that they have achieved the targets. Interesting activities motivate pupils to work hard and increase their enjoyment of learning. During and at the end of lessons, teachers review and celebrate pupils' work, involving them fully in the process of evaluating how well they have learned. For example, a Year 2 pupil said, 'I use wow words to make my writing better!' Most lessons move along at a good pace, keeping pupils actively engaged. Teachers make very effective use of different methods to get the best out of pupils and strengthen their learning, for example using talking partners and ensuring a balance of practical work and written recording to keep pupils interested. Occasionally teachers talk for too long and pupils become a little frustrated waiting to begin work. Teachers manage pupils' behaviour extremely well and relationships are very good. Teaching assistants make a good contribution in supporting the work of groups and individuals. Marking is regular and constructive, giving pupils good feedback on their strengths and how they can improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum meets all requirements and is well planned. It has been developed to include a thematic approach that makes clear links between subjects to help pupils transfer key skills and develop their understanding. The school works productively with local partners to arrange interesting visits and invites visitors to enhance the curriculum, with significant impact on pupils' enjoyment of school. A good range of extra-curricular activities contributes well to

pupils' personal development. Parents are becoming better informed about the work their children cover through information sent home and the co-located children's centre.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Parents are pleased with the way in which the school cares for their children, saying, for example, 'All staff work well together and are committed to the care and education of all the children.' Arrangements to ensure child protection, health and safety are in place and regularly reviewed. Different groups of pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, vulnerable pupils and those learning English as a second language, receive very effective support. Pupils with moderate learning difficulties, including those with a statement of special educational need, receive effective, skilful teaching ensuring that they make good progress. Vulnerable pupils and those who speak English as a second language are provided with additional focused support and the school works effectively with several outside agencies to overcome barriers to learning. These agencies strongly endorse the school's outstanding work in this area. Pupils are well motivated by a system of reward that recognises improvements in attendance and good personal development and achievements. For instance, a celebration assembly takes place each week where awards are given and postcards are sent home for effort in learning. Academic guidance is outstanding and pupils know what they must do to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership team under the direction of the headteacher have focused well on the key, identified areas to improve achievement and standards. The cycle of self-evaluation involves all staff and governors in the continuous examination of key priorities for development. The initiatives in the curriculum and focused support systems that are in place are already showing impact on standards and pupils' progress. Members of the governing body offer good support and challenge to the school. They are involved in the self-evaluation process and have links with subject leaders through visits to lessons and feedback from staff. The headteacher and senior management team are aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Teaching is monitored well but the analysis of tracking data is not sharp enough. Tracking systems will need to be extended so that different groups can be tracked effectively enabling challenging targets to be met.

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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 | 4 |
| 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? | 1 |

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 | 3 |
| 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 |

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

On behalf of the inspectors I would like to thank you very much for your help when we visited your school. We enjoyed our visit very much. Now I would like to share with you what we thought about your school.

Your school is giving you a good standard of education. This means it is doing some really good things to help you. Here are some of these:

- all the staff take very good care of you and help you to be fit, safe and healthy
- your behaviour is good and you are growing into sensible students who want to learn
- your teachers teach you well. They are really good at marking your work so you can do better. They give you good opportunities for sports, trips, after-school clubs and invite interesting visitors to school
- pupils who find some schoolwork difficult have good help from teachers and classroom assistants.

There are also some things that your school needs to do to make learning even better. These are the things we have asked your school to do:

- make sure that you reach higher standards in English and mathematics
- make sure that you come to school regularly, on time and try your very best to get 100% attendance
- extend the system to track your progress so your challenging targets will help to improve standards.

You can help too and make your school even better: make sure that your attendance is good, work hard in lessons and do your very best!