

Lowercroft Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105295
Local Authority	Bury
Inspection number	308823
Inspection date	26 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Brenda McIntosh

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	245
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Ken Airey
Headteacher	Mrs J Boardman
Date of previous school inspection	7 March 2005
School address	Ashington Drive Bury Lancashire BL8 2TS
Telephone number	0161 7612798
Fax number	0161 7973465

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards; the features of teaching and learning and the curriculum that lead to consistently high academic and personal achievements, and the effectiveness of the Foundation Stage. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation form (SEF), national published assessment data, the school's own assessment records, relevant policies, and observations of the school at work, including visits to lessons and analysis of parents' questionnaires. Discussions with staff, pupils, governors and parents were held. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its SEF, were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The school is average in size. It is heavily oversubscribed. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage and come from varied social and economic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is lower than in most schools. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average although an above average proportion has a statement of special educational needs. The school has achieved the Basic Skills Award, Active Mark and the Healthy Schools Standard Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is a school of outstanding quality. Inspirational leadership engenders high expectations and a vibrant team spirit that enables pupils to achieve exceptionally well, both academically and in their personal development. The school provides a climate where pupils flourish and gain tremendous pleasure both from learning and finding things out for themselves. The school listens to parents' views and has their overwhelming support. The daily 'Wake Up and Shake Up' sessions on the school playground before the start of school promote good physical exercise and set a tone of fun and enthusiasm for the day ahead. The 'family atmosphere' that many parents commented about is clearly evident. Relationships throughout the school are very strong and ensure pupils have the confidence to ask for help should they need it. Staff have an acute awareness of pupils' individual needs which contributes to their all round development.

The school has done extremely well since the last inspection, sustaining high academic standards whilst not losing sight of the importance of developing pupils' personal qualities. Pupils grow in maturity and confidence and are very thoughtful members of the school community. School councillors are proud to have a say in improving aspects of school life. They were very instrumental in helping the school gain the Healthy School Award. This has helped other pupils gain an excellent understanding of keeping safe and healthy. Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school is impeccable. Staff show a high level of care for pupils' well-being. Safeguarding procedures are in place and meet fully the current requirements.

During their time in school pupils' achievement is outstanding. Children enter the Foundation Stage (Reception) with skills that are broadly as expected for their age. Here, they get off to an excellent start to their learning. By the time they start Year 1, their standards are above those typically seen in all areas of learning. Throughout the school all staff make very effective use of assessment information to accelerate pupils' progress towards very challenging targets. As a result, by the end of Year 6, pupils reach exceptionally high standards in English, mathematics and science. Pupils show a high level of understanding of difficult concepts and use appropriate technical vocabulary quite naturally when giving answers to teachers' questions. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also make outstanding progress. Additional well-tailored support enables the vast majority of these pupils to attain the expected level for their age in each of the three subjects. In science and mathematics they often reach above average standards.

Rigorous monitoring and evaluation of performance enables the school to keep a very sharp focus on pupils' progress and initiate new and innovative ideas to ensure its continued success and further improve what it provides. The professional judgement and expertise of staff play a key part in improving the curriculum and quality of teaching. This ensures pupils of all backgrounds and abilities get the best out of their learning. The curriculum is excellent and sparks pupils' imagination and curiosity. It meets the needs of all pupils very well because it is thoughtfully planned to give ample opportunity for first-hand experiences and for pupils to investigate things for themselves. Pupils comment that they, 'never get bored because they learn many new things each day'. In lessons pupils are alert and highly involved in their own learning.

The high level knowledge of staff in some subjects, such as mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT) opens up many opportunities for some pupils to gain very high levels of attainment that are way beyond the expectations for their age. Very good use is

made of a variety of specialist teachers to enhance the curriculum and develop pupils' individual talents, for example, in physical education and the teaching of French in Key Stage 2. ICT is used widely to extend and challenge learning in other subjects. Projects such as the development of the environmental area develop pupils' understanding of economics and sustainable development.

School self-evaluation is accurate and reflects the rigorous monitoring at all levels. The school is not complacent and ensures that all staff training is up to date in order to provide the best education it can for its pupils. Governors too play a significant part in the outstanding leadership and management of the school. They clearly have a 'hands on approach' in checking what works well and where things could be improved. Through their high level of support much has been achieved in improving the accommodation since the last inspection, particularly in the Foundation Stage. Finances are carefully managed to provide excellent value for money. The school's track record of maintaining and extending further high standards across the board demonstrates an outstanding capacity to secure sustained improvement.

Pupils' comments such as, 'This is a happy school, we have good friends, nice teachers and lovely cooks and it is a clean place to learn' shows an appreciation for all those who contribute to making this an outstanding school.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

There are very effective induction arrangements to help the children to settle quickly and happily into Reception. The excellent attention to developing children's personal and social skills leads to a high level of self-confidence and independence. After only a few weeks in school children show an impressive awareness of the routines and what is expected of them. Their behaviour is excellent. Children chatter excitedly to their newfound friends explaining about their families and which nurseries they have come from. Children cooperate very well and expressed great delight as they successfully carried out the teacher's instructions in the 'parachute' activity. Leadership and management are very good. Adults work very effectively together to provide stimulating learning experiences which ensure children make very good progress in all areas of learning. Frequent observations of children's achievements are clearly recorded to keep a close check on their progress. Assessment information is used effectively to identify areas for development. For example, it has highlighted variations in children's skills on entry to Reception. Although overall skills are broadly as expected, often their communication, language and literacy skills are below expected levels. New initiatives focusing on letters and sounds are currently being introduced to give a boost to early reading and writing skills. The internal accommodation has been thoughtfully re-designed to create a bright learning environment. The development of the outdoor learning environment is taking shape.

What the school should do to improve further

The leadership has clearly identified what it needs to do to sustain school improvement. Consequently, there are no further issues to add.

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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?	1
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?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
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

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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**

Thank you so much for the warm welcome when I visited your school recently. You helped me tremendously with the inspection by talking to me so openly about your school. It gave me a clear picture of the things that help you to achieve such high standards and how much you enjoy learning.

Lowercroft is an outstanding school. Your headteacher, governors and all the staff are an excellent team and work tirelessly for your benefit. As a result of this you work hard to achieve your very best. In lessons you are very alert and your eagerness to learn new things is very clear. Your behaviour is excellent and contributes much to the 'family atmosphere' that many people involved with your school comment about. The teachers make learning interesting and provide you with many opportunities for you to take part in practical activities, which help you to understand the various subjects and topics in great detail. There is scope for you to study to very high levels that are way beyond your age and many of you do. You use information and communication technology extremely well to help you with your learning in other subjects.

The teachers are also doing an excellent job in teaching you how to care for others and stay fit and healthy. Your daily 'Wake Up and Shake Up' sessions get everyone ready for the day ahead. You certainly seem to enjoy these activities and so do your parents and teachers.

Your headteacher and other adults know exactly what needs to be done to make sure Lowercroft continues to be an outstanding school. You too can do your bit by continuing to try your best and behaving so well. I hope you carry on enjoying school and doing so exceptionally well with your work.