

Barlow Hall Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105484
Local Authority	Manchester
Inspection number	308864
Inspection dates	14–15 April 2008
Reporting inspector	John Coleman 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	241
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Miguel Jackson
Headteacher	Ms Jayne Kennedy
Date of previous school inspection	13 September 2004
School address	Darley Avenue Chorlton-cum-Hardy Manchester Lancashire M21 2JA
Telephone number	0161 8812158
Fax number	0161 8812158

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Barlow Hall is an average-sized primary school. The number of pupils entitled to free school meals is well above average. A very high percentage of pupils do not have English as their first language and more than 20 other languages are represented. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic origins is well above average. Many pupils live in areas which have high levels of social and economic deprivation. A very high percentage of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The numbers of pupils joining or leaving the school other than at the normal time of admission or transition is very high. The school has been awarded the local authority's gold inclusion standard.

The school has a Nursery. It also provides before- and after-school care which at the time of inspection was not registered with Ofsted. This has been brought to the attention of the school and registration is to be submitted immediately. A Sure Start children's centre has been built on the school site and is due to open in the near future.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Barlow Hall Primary is a good school. The headteacher's outstanding leadership with good support from governors has built an effective senior team which is committed to continually improving the school's provision. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning is consistently good, pupils make good progress, and standards, whilst average overall, are rising significantly. Given the very low level of skills with which many children enter the school, this represents good achievement. This is an inclusive school where all groups of pupils achieve well, including those for whom English is a second language, those with minority ethnic origins and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The improvement in the standards attained by pupils is the result of effective strategies, led by the headteacher, to raise the quality of teaching and learning. This focus is relentless and is shared by all staff. There is no inadequate teaching, most lessons are good and some practice is outstanding. Teachers are well supported by regular, targeted training which springs from the results of the senior leaders' monitoring and evaluations of lessons. Pupils enjoy coming to school. They say they like the emphasis given to practical activities which helps them to understand their learning. The school has rightly prioritised the teaching of reading. Through very good use of local authority expertise in a national reading programme, many pupils have been able to make rapid progress. For example, some Year 1 and Year 2 pupils have advanced over 2 years in their reading age in the space of 20 weeks on the reading programme. The school strongly promotes the development of pupils' speaking and listening skills and staff take good advantage of opportunities to build pupils' confidence and knowledge in this area. Despite this emphasis, many pupils have speaking skills which are below those found in pupils of similar age. A good assessment and tracking system is used effectively to monitor each pupil's progress and teachers use this information well to plan lessons. Through this system, the school is aware that the proportion of pupils reaching Level 3 in Key Stage 1 is too low. There are insufficient challenging activities for the most able pupils. Pupils' work is regularly marked but there are variations in the quality of this. There is a lack of consistently good feedback to pupils so that they know how to improve their work.

The curriculum provides well for pupils' needs and is designed for their interest and engagement. As a result, pupils develop independence, confidence and good self-esteem. There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities, including opportunities to take part in many different sports. A residential visit is made each year to the Lake District for the oldest pupils.

The school has an outstanding range of partnerships with agencies and services which serve pupils' needs very well. Three learning networks have been established with local schools to help in the development of teaching and learning, pupils' transition from Key Stage 1 to 2 and in behaviour management. The last of these has resulted in significant improvements in the opportunities provided for pupils at lunchtime. There are now many extra balls, hoops and games to play and the school makes very good use of the extensive open space. Sports coaches are employed to add specialist knowledge and pupils speak highly of these changes. Transition arrangements to high school are effective. Partnerships with parents are very strong and questionnaires received by inspectors were completely unanimous in their support for the school. A group of parents who spoke with the lead inspector described the school as welcoming. One telling comment from a parent was, 'The headteacher is visible, approachable and friendly; she is the main reason behind the big improvement in the school.' They value the forums offered by the headteacher where parents can discuss issues and offer ideas. Multi-agency external

support for pupils who may be vulnerable is very good. Pupils say they feel safe in school, they behave well and relationships with teachers are warm and respectful.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The quality of education in the Foundation Stage, and its leadership and management, is good. On entry to Nursery, children are assessed against the main areas of learning and for their social and welfare needs. This is used well to identify the individual requirements for each child. Effective tracking procedures ensure that each child's progress is carefully monitored. As a result of consistently good teaching, the children make good progress and achieve well. Particular attention is given to developing children's speaking and listening and this results in good gains in the level of skills in this area. Even so, children's speaking skills remain well below those expected in similar-aged children. Very good use is made of the outdoor areas to extend children's learning, and the level of resources including large toys and apparatus is good. Overall, most children enter Nursery with skills well below those expected but by the end of Foundation Stage they have made up much ground and achieve only a little below the levels expected of most children.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the standards attained by the most able pupils in Key Stage 1.
- Improve pupils' speaking skills.
- Improve the consistency of marking so that pupils are clear about how to improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

On entry to Nursery many children have skills which are well below those expected in children of the same age. Because of good teaching, they progress well so that by the end of the Reception class these skills are either a little below those in similar schools or are about the same. In Key Stage 1 pupils make good progress and receive good teaching. Standards, as seen in national assessments taken at the end of Year 2, have been below average in reading, writing and mathematics for many years. In 2007, standards in mathematics rose to average and current school indications show standards rising in reading, writing and mathematics. The most able pupils do not always attain the standards of which they are capable.

In Key Stage 2, after many years of being very low, standards rose in 2006 and 2007. In 2007, pupils achieved average standards in English, mathematics and science. These results demonstrated good achievement given the very low starting points of many of this cohort of pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy coming to school and talk about their school with pride. They progress well in becoming polite and considerate youngsters because of the good guidance they receive from teachers and support staff. As a result of the effective strategies put in place by staff, pupils behave well in and around the school and cooperate with their teachers. They enjoy lessons, and the good range of clubs and activities provided by the school. They know about healthy lifestyles and how to keep safe from harm. As one pupil commented, 'The buddies have definitely

improved things. I don't think there's any bullying now.' Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. Pupils' moral and social development are particular strengths. Pupils contribute to a variety of charities including Children In Need and Sports Relief and so develop a good awareness of the needs of others. The school council gives pupils a voice in the school. Attendance is satisfactory. Levels are below average but the school has adopted many strategies to tackle this, and there are signs of improvement. Pupils' life skills, such as teamwork and basic competencies are being developed effectively.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. It ranges from satisfactory to outstanding but most lessons are good. Lessons are characterised by good behaviour from the pupils and strong relationships between pupils and staff. There is very good support from teaching assistants who work closely with teachers to provide effective guidance and close attention to a range of pupils' needs. Many lessons provide interesting practical activities which pupils enjoy; this engages them in their learning so that they make good progress. An emphasis is placed on developing pupils' basic skills in literacy and numeracy and every opportunity is taken to promote this in lessons across the curriculum. Marking of pupils' work differs between classes and there is inconsistency in the quality of this feedback. Consequently, some pupils are unsure about how to improve their work. The presentation of pupils' written work is also variable. In most lessons, pupils work well together and they gain much from opportunities to talk about their learning in small groups and with partners.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

A strong emphasis is placed on developing pupils' basic skills in English, mathematics, science, and information and communication technology. Provision for developing children's reading skills is particularly strong and its effectiveness can be seen in higher achievement throughout the school. The curriculum structure has recently been reviewed to make it more relevant; it is going to take time for the improvements to become embedded. At the moment, not enough activities are provided to challenge the most able pupils in Years 1 and 2. Pupils enjoy the good range of extra-curricular activities on offer and value opportunities to engage in scientific investigations and to learn French and Spanish. The personal, social and health education programme contributes very well to pupils' personal development and well-being, especially their emotional development. Good use is made of local resources, such as the Water Park, and visitors to the school support the drive to improve standards. Opportunities for pupils to enhance their learning through trips and visits including a residential are good.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils and parents rightly speak very highly of the school's welcoming nature and friendly atmosphere. Staff are good role models, treating the pupils with respect and having high expectations about behaviour. The school complies fully with all requirements for child protection and safeguarding its pupils. Pupils feel well supported and are confident that staff will resolve any issues of concern promptly. The school keeps detailed records on vulnerable pupils, including

those who join the school after the usual admission time and those who are learning English as an additional language, and provides well for their needs. Links with parents and outside agencies are excellent and have a positive impact on supporting pupils and their families. Guidance and support for pupils with behaviour and emotional difficulties are outstanding and a major reason why achievement for these pupils has improved. The school now has a firm and realistic grasp of how well pupils are doing and what progress they are making. Pupils value and appreciate the positive feedback they receive from teachers about their work. However, there are inconsistencies in the marking of work and, as a result, pupils are not always sufficiently aware of what they need to do to improve their work and to get to the next level.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The quality of leadership and management is good. The headteacher inspires an effective senior team which gives strong support to the outstanding direction she provides. Parents who spoke to inspectors were unanimous in their praise for the very good communication which has been established with the school through the approachability and availability of the headteacher. She has brought about a significant review of the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders and this has resulted in staff feeling more confident, empowered and valued. There is a rigorous focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning and a complete commitment from all staff to achieving this aim. As a result, standards are rising and there is good capacity to improve.

School governors and senior staff have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses because of their effective monitoring procedures. The priorities in the school development plan clearly reflect the outcomes of this. However, the criteria used to measure the success of each initiative lack interim milestones where clear indications of progress can be made. The restructured roles of senior leaders are also relatively new and the timings of monitoring activities are not yet coordinated across each key stage. The chair of governors is knowledgeable about the school. The team he leads is supportive of the school and governors receive good information from the headteacher and the local authority. Each governor is twinned with a class of pupils and some governors make effective use of this to visit the school when their class is involved in assemblies or other events. This increases governors' awareness of issues facing the school and enables them to challenge the school where appropriate.

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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?	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?	1
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	3
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	2
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Following our inspection of your school, we would like to thank you for making us feel so welcome and for talking to us about your experiences. We would like to tell you what we found out about your school.

- Barlow Hall is a good school.
- You enjoy coming to school, you behave well and work hard.
- Your headteacher gives the school outstanding leadership.
- Lessons are interesting and you learn well so that you are prepared for high school when it is time for you to leave.
- The standards you reach are improving fast.
- All the staff care for you and they help you to mature and be responsible.
- You feel safe and free from bullying or racism.
- Many of you take part in the extra activities, especially sport, and you enjoy these.

We have asked the school to improve some things and these are:

- improve your speaking skills
- make sure those of you in Key Stage 1 who can reach the highest standards do so
- to give all of you better help to improve your work by marking your books with clear guidance.

Thank you for helping us so much with the inspection of your school. We hope you will carry on enjoying learning and helping your teachers to make Barlow Hall an even better school.